ROGER BLOOMER

A Play in Three Acts

by

John Howard Lawson

By the author with 1/24
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A Play in Three Acts

BY

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

Foreword by JOHN DOS PASSOS

Illustrations by ROLAND YOUNG

NEW YORK
THOMAS SELTZER
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FOREWORD

In a year or ten years or a hundred years there is going to be a theater in America. The continuously increasing pressure in the grinding engine of industrial life will force other safety valves than baseball and the movies and the Ku Klux Klan. Something approximating a national theater is the most direct organ of group consciousness and will come into being, inevitable with the welding of our cities into living organisms out of the junk heaps of boxed and predatory individuals that they are at present.

But will the cities come alive? They will either come alive or be filled with robots instead of men.

There are all sorts of elements in our stage of the moment that will probably be discovered later to have been the foundations of a genuine native tradition. Already plays like *Blue Jeans* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Ben Hur* had a quality that distinguished them from their British equivalents. The series of Ten-Twenty-Thirty melodramas and sob plays with their accompanying pie-slinging farces were a very genuine expression of the period of crude industrial expansion when people's energies were so drained by the physical effort of building up the country and

their own fortunes that they had no need of safety-valves. Now the country is all built up and the fortunes of the tenth that had luck, and here we are, walled in. The forced draft puffs as hard as ever and the pressure rises, rises.

The theater hasn't kept up with the race. At the same time as the desire and need for it has grown the actual stage has become more and more disorganized. There are heaven knows how many playhouses in New York, but the only one of them that has a definite audience and a definite tradition, that really exists as a theater apart from the building it uses, has for its language not English but Yiddish.

Roger Bloomer is a raw, unlabelled attempt to use the emotional possibilities of the theater to their fullest extent for the expression of the commonest American theme—a boy running away from home to go to the big city. Explosions of fresh vitality in any art necessarily destroy the old forms.

What we have in American theaters today is a great uncoördinated swirl of individual energy and mechanical skill, that if it could only be got into motion towards an end would produce something inconceivable. There is in the extraordinary skill with which vaudeville performers put themselves over individually to the audience in the short time allotted to them, in the satire and construction you get occasionally in burlesque shows and musical comedies, in

the brilliant acting and producing it takes to get across trick melodramas and mystery plays, raw material for anything anyone wants to make.

So far no one has had the nerve or the muscle to tackle the amazingly difficult problem of fusing all this personal effort and mechanical skill into something immediate and alive, expressive of an emotion and a will.

There have been weak attempts in all sorts of directions, national theaters built, experimental clubs, fine beginnings made, but so far no man has surmounted the complications of play production to the extent of putting on a great show really creating a lasting monument to any aspect of New York. Say, something that would bear the relation to America that *Le Sacre Du Printemps* and *The Cherry Orchard* bear to Russia, that *Les Maries de la Tour Eiffel* bears to France, that *Peer Gynt* bears to Norway.

Not so fast. The scaffolding is barely begun, it's too early to talk of putting the apex on the pyramid. What I mean is that given the unprecedented fever and inhumanness and mechanical complexity of American life, the monument must be tough and solid and lustily built to make a place for itself at all on this continent, where it will be unprecedented, looked at with suspicion and dismay, perhaps unnoticed for generations.

Perhaps our time will only manage to pile up foundations for others to build on, perhaps it wont even manage that. The New York theater today has no more to do with the daily existence of the average New Yorker, with his hungers and terrors, than it has with the pigtail of the living God at Lhasa. The burlesque shows and even the movies are much closer. The plays of Eugene O'Neil, including *The Hairy Ape,* have only touched the problem. *Roger Bloomer* is only a beginning.

Like everything else about the American theater, a criterion of judgment exists if at all, only in vague conditional prophecy. Before we can have standards of comparison, we've got to have plays, and audience, a tradition.

John Dos Passos.

"ROGER BLOOMER"

was first produced by Equity Players, at the Equity Forty-eighth Street Theater, March 1st, 1923.

Then at the Greenwich Village Theater by Marguerite A. Barker.

Production planned by AUGUSTIN DUNCAN

Directed by MRS. SHELLEY HULL

Scenery designed by WOODMAN THOMPSON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Roger Bloomer.....Henry Hull
Mrs. Bloomer.....Caroline Newcombe
Everett Bloomer.....Walter Walker
Mary, the Maid.....Isabel Hill
Mr. Poppin.....John C. Hickey
Eugene Poppin.....Louis Calhern
Emma, the Stenographer.....Adelaide Wilson
Louise.....Mary Fowler
Another Salesgirl.....Helen Carew
A College Examiner.....J. Hammond Dailey
A Landlady.....Julia Ralph
Miss Burns.....Helen Van Hoose
Elliott T. Rumsey.....Frederick Burton
Office Assistants.....Alan Bunce, Dolph Ryan, Robert Forsythe, Harry Hahn
A Ragged Man.....Fletcher Norton
A Street Walker.....Margaret Fareleigh
Drug Clerk.....Charles Webster

CAST OF CHARACTERS (Continued)

Another Drug Clerk.....Harry Hahn
An Old Man.....Halliam Bosworth
Another Old Man.....James G. Morton
A Detective .....Halliam Bosworth
A Judge .....Thomas J. Keogh
Prison Attendant.....Emil Hoch
Tall Old Woman.....Helen Van Hoose
Small Old Woman.....Kate Morgan

TYPE OF ACTOR

ROGER BLOOMER *must* be played by an actor of sturdy virile appearance, giving impression of average American boy. ROGER'S problem is that of normal young manhood. He is not neurasthenic, but rather the most normal person in the play.

SETTING

Scenic plan involves the simplest use of setting conveying impression by single articles of furniture, and portable setting, spotted against curtains, with occasional use of painted drops. Elaboration or expensiveness would hurt the play. The suggested division of the stage into sections, with the action taking place first at one side and then at the other as indicated in the text, does not mean that the movement of the players is confined to small cubby-holes in which they enact realistic bits of action. On the contrary, these divisions are rather used to suggest the background of the scene, but full width of stage, curtained in simplest manner, is used by the actors in the great majority of scenes.

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ROGER BLOOMER

ACT I

EXCELSIOR, IOWA

ROGER BLOOMER

ACT I

The outer curtain of ACT I *is yellow, like fields of wheat, patterned with olive green of young trees. It opens and*

The BLOOMER *family is at dinner under a red-and-green electric lamp.* MRS. BLOOMER *sits center, facing audience fatuously, her husband to her right, her son to her left. A matronly smallish woman.* EVERETT BLOOMER *is middle-aged, hair turning gray. His stomach is beginning to bulge, for he is swelling a little with prosperity. His neck is becoming flabby under his wide stiff jaw. He owns the biggest store in a town of thirty thousand people. It is located at the corner of Main Street and Upper Broadway.* ROGER *is eighteen, an average American boy of Middle Western type, solidly built, keen face, vigorous character. He has reached the age when many things begin to worry him.*

[*Dining-room set is at left, occupying more than half the stage. Right of it darkness, the remaining space being curtained off.*]

[*The* MAID *waits at* BLOOMER'S *elbow as he carves the roast. He does this earnestly, standing up to it, his sleeves pulled back, eyes intent. The others watch in silence.* ROGER *taps nervously on the table with his fork. Having done full justice to the cutting,* BLOOMER *sits, selects a piece which he puts on a plate, with potato and gravy.*]

BLOOMER

[*Passing it to maid, looking at his wife.*] That's for you, mother. [MRS. BLOOMER'S *fatuous fixed look has centered on space. She now lowers her head to stare at the plate in front of her. Silence while* BLOOMER *helps himself and his son. Then* BLOOMER *sighs, produces a big white handkerchief, wipes his face and settles himself.*] That's over. [*They eat several mouthfuls in silence.*] Excellent cut of meat tonight.

ROGER

You say that every night.

MRS. BLOOMER

My dear boy, I always buy the best.

ROGER

Yes, mother. [*The* MAID *has passed the vegetables.*]

BLOOMER

Lucky to be able to . . . I tell you, there was a day when the food in my mouth didn't come easy. [*They eat with clock-like regularity.*] It came with sweat in those days . . . sweat . . . sweat!

MRS. BLOOMER

I don't know how the poor manage to live.

BLOOMER

Poor! Who's poor? There's no poor in America.

ROGER

But you always tell us how poor you were yourself.

BLOOMER

That's different; times have changed. I was a poor boy, I sweated and made good. People don't know the meaning of sweat these days—that's the whole cause of this social unrest: no poor in America.

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Venturing on dangerous ground.*] Think of Poland!

ROGER

[*Waving knife and fork with his mouth full.*] Russia, Turkey . . . Armenia . . .

BLOOMER

This is the U. S. A., isn't it? [*They all nod sleepily.*] This is Iowa, isn't it? Little old Iowa! Down to the store, the poor come in and buy aluminum pans and silk stockings that you wouldn't afford yourself, mother.

MRS. BLOOMER

No, no.

BLOOMER

Over-pay the poor and you cheat the rich!

ROGER

You're rich now, aren't you, father?

BLOOMER

I . . . oh, so, so!

ROGER

Then what do you care?

BLOOMER

[*Lays down knife and fork and looks at his son.*] What? What? . . . what do I care? It's my money, isn't it? My store? The margin of profit

is comparatively narrow in any case—modern merchandising. Why should I, who built the store out of my sweat, I did, why should I be bullied into paying inefficient people more than they deserve?

ROGER

[*Embarrassed.*] But you have enough. . . . I mean, you have money . . . enough money!

BLOOMER

[*With almost passion.*] Never enough money! Never enough. [MRS. BLOOMER *agrees fatuously.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

What's the world coming to? [*A long dead pause.*]

BLOOMER

[*Across to* ROGER, *more confidentially.*] I need every penny, I'm thinking of spreading, spreading . . . opening stores in other cities . . . my stores, spreading! [*He sits quite still, stirred by this dream.*]

ROGER

Think of that . . .

BLOOMER

Look at Woolworth, there's a great man: there's America for you, Washington to Woolworth, business . . . spread . . . spread!

ROGER

Father, which was a greater man, Washington or Lincoln?

BLOOMER

[*Thinks it over, then dogmatically.*] Washington, because he was the father of his country. [ROGER *is tipping back his chair.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

Roger, please don't do that, it makes me so nervous.

ROGER

Excuse me, mother.

BLOOMER

But what about Woolworth?

ROGER

Washington had an ideal, Freedom! Lincoln had an ideal, Freedom! What was Woolworth's ideal?

BLOOMER

To sell big and sell cheap. [MAID *is clearing away dishes.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

What's the world coming to?

BLOOMER

Is there salad this evening?

MRS. BLOOMER

No, just rice pudding.

ROGER

There was rice pudding night before last.

MRS. BLOOMER

You had ice cream last night. [MAID *brings the rice pudding which* BLOOMER *serves.* ROGER *is again tipping his chair.*] Don't do that, Roger.

ROGER

[*As before.*] Excuse me, mother.

MRS. BLOOMER

How nervous you are in Springtime, Roger.

BLOOMER

This is different from other Springtimes, Roger with college just ahead of him.

MRS. BLOOMER

Roger's getting to be a man——

BLOOMER

Got a long way to go yet, eh, Roger? [ROGER *is gloomily silent.*] And this college problem. . . .

[BLOOMER *scratches his head.*] Well, I'm not much on education, it's for you to have the learning I missed, Roger. . . . All I know about is the store. . . . [*He sits back and smiles, contemplative after an excellent meal, slowly, half to himself.*] Pots and pans . . . pianos . . . millinery . . . farm machinery and miscellaneous cutlery—that's me, I've made that! [ROGER *folds his napkin and rises.*]

ROGER

Excuse me . . . tired: I think I'll go to my room. I don't care for any rice pudding. Good night. [*He crosses into shadow right, opens a door from which comes a streak of light, right center. He shuts the door behind him. The father and mother sit in silence, eating rhythmically.*]

BLOOMER

More?

MRS. BLOOMER

[*With the usual twitter in her voice.*] No, thank you.

BLOOMER

[*To* MAID.] That's all, Mary. [MARY *carries out rice pudding and dishes.*] Queer!

MRS. BLOOMER

What's queer?

BLOOMER

Nothing.

MRS. BLOOMER

Why shouldn't he go to his own room after dinner?

BLOOMER

Every night, he runs, as if he were escaping from us——

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Frightened.*] No!

BLOOMER

That's how I feel it.

MRS. BLOOMER

[*With a gasp.*] Oh . . .

BLOOMER

Alone in there, him and his books. . . . [*Disgustedly.*] Books! . . . Queer boy . . . queer . . .

MRS. BLOOMER

What?

BLOOMER

I said, queer.

MRS. BLOOMER

I guess it's just the Spring!

BLOOMER

A boy is a responsibility and I feel it.

MRS. BLOOMER

You! What about me?

BLOOMER

You don't understand.

MRS. BLOOMER

Think how much worse it would be if it had been a girl.

BLOOMER

One thing: He'll be safe at college.

MRS. BLOOMER

Safe at college!

BLOOMER

Won't he?

MRS. BLOOMER

It's you that don't understand. I'm losing him anyway—he's not my son any more . . . lost!

BLOOMER

That's your side of it. My side of it is, it's disagreeable to have a son who . . . he . . . who's different from other people.

MRS. BLOOMER

Seems like you ought to be proud to have him different.

BLOOMER

Anybody who's a little different from everybody else gets it in the neck. That boy is fixing up to get it in the neck. That's why I'm talking. It's up to us to smooth him out . . . mold! [MRS. BLOOMER *shakes her head. There are tears in her eyes.*] You're his mother, talk to him.

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Wiping her eyes.*] I can't.

BLOOMER

What do you mean, you can't?

MRS. BLOOMER

Grown up! All of a sudden, quick, grown up! . . . [*Gradually as she talks the fatuous little lady becomes a personality.*] He's hidden his heart where I can't find it. He's gone on a trip, his heart has, a million miles away, and he's never coming back. . . . [*Pointing to* ROGER'S *closed door.*] What goes on in there?

BLOOMER

What goes on in his head?

MRS. BLOOMER

Yes, I mean his head! What goes on? You don't know . . . you never will, you can't . . . it's his . . . it's a closed door, barred, locked, secret, secret . . . [*Her voice trails off in tears.*]

BLOOMER

I never heard you go on like this before.

MRS. BLOOMER

You never will again. I'm scared . . . it's an awful thing to have a son. [*They have moved into the shadowed space right.* BLOOMER *turns on an electric drop-light on the table beside him. They are in the* BLOOMER *living-room, extreme right of stage. Abruptly, startlingly,* MRS. BLOOMER *lapses into fatuity.*] Here's your evening paper. [BLOOMER *with a yawn lapses into the only comfortable chair, rattling his paper. The* MAID *returns to the dining room, puts out the light and departs.* MRS. BLOOMER, *sitting on the edge of a small chair, picks up her sewing. After a moment, she speaks with a little twittering sigh.*] Isn't the new lamp beautiful?

BLOOMER

[*Glancing at it.*] It cost money. [BLOOMER *suddenly rises.*] This can't go on! I'm going to talk to him. [*He knocks at* ROGER'S *door.* MRS.

BLOOMER *shakes her head sadly.*] Roger, come out will you? Just take a little walk with me, down street and back. [ROGER *comes out.* BLOOMER *coughs self-consciously.*] Not so busy with your books you can't spare a minute for your old father.

ROGER

All right, dad.

MRS. BLOOMER

Take your muffler, Roger, the air's still sharp. [*The two men go. The curtain closes on* MRS. BLOOMER *who sews, smiling fatuously.*]

Before the Outer Curtain.

[*The dusty twilight of the prairies. Enter left,* BLOOMER *with* ROGER. BLOOMER *smokes a cigar.*]

BLOOMER

Going to be a fine night, and yet . . . yet there might be a little storm at that.

ROGER

[*Sullenly.*] You wanted to talk to me, dad?

BLOOMER

Yes, but I don't seem to have so much to say now. [*Pause.*] The air's a bit sharp still . . . um . . . how the dust blows— We seem to be growing apart,

that's not right, fathers and sons should be pals! [*Enter right,* POPPIN *with his son* EUGENE.] There's Poppin with that boy of his; that's a college boy, that is! [POPPIN *is a large loose man with flapping old-fashioned clothes. A big red face and voice hoarse from years of political speaking. His son is a stocky young man of twenty-three, of much the same physical type as* ROGER, *but heavier and older by five important years.* EUGENE *is well poised, college clothes, and hair glossed back. The* POPPINS *are laughing.* BLOOMER *turns pathetically to* ROGER *as they approach.*] Now there!

EUGENE

That's a good one, dad

POPPIN

[*Slapping his son on shoulder.*] Thought your father was a dead one, eh? Life in the old horse yet, boy! [*The two parties meet.*] How'dy, Bloomer.

BLOOMER

Hello, Poppin, taking a little air?

POPPIN

Me an' the boy takin' a little air after dinner.

BLOOMER

How's the missus?

POPPIN

Good! How's your missus?

BLOOMER

Good!

POPPIN

Um . . . how the dust blows.

BLOOMER

Just what I was saying: dust thick in the houses.

POPPIN

Hardly know Gene, would you? Filled out, ain't he?

BLOOMER

Filled out big.

POPPIN

Home from Yale on his Easter vacation.

BLOOMER

[*Tapping* EUGENE's *chest.*] Where'd you get that chest, Eugene?

POPPIN

That's the Yale chest, Bloomer.

BLOOMER

I hear you're on a team at Yale.

EUGENE

I'm Yale Varsity football.

BLOOMER

Varsity! That's a proud thing, that's making good!

POPPIN

And not only that— I tell you he's made friends —going to spend this summer in New York——

BLOOMER

New York . . .

POPPIN

[*In an awed voice.*] He's got millionaire friends . . .

BLOOMER

That's making good! Now my son— [ROGER *has remained in the background.*]

POPPIN

He ain't made good yet, give him time.

BLOOMER

Roger is on his way to college—but not East. Too far away from his old father: we been thinking of State College.

EUGENE

[*Sarcastic.*] Ah! State College?

BLOOMER

Suppose you boys walk along: Poppin and me will have a little chat.

EUGENE

Sure, sir. [EUGENE *and* ROGER *move to right.* BLOOMER *and* POPPIN *to left.*] Have a cigarette?

ROGER

I don't smoke. [EUGENE *lights one.*]

POPPIN

[*To* BLOOMER, *left.*] What's new?

BLOOMER

One thing and another. [*They descend steps left into orchestra in silence.*]

POPPIN

Got something on your mind?

BLOOMER

Yes, I have.

POPPIN

I seen you had: I guess you an' me understand each other. I guess you an' me stand for good business in this town—and all over Iowa! Money's a little tight this spring, but——

BLOOMER

[*Muttering.*] It ain't that, it ain't that, it's my son!

POPPIN

What about him? [*Meanwhile,* EUGENE *leans against proscenium right, smoking his cigarette, occasionally addressing* ROGER.]

EUGENE

Know any skirts in this town?

ROGER

No.

EUGENE

I do! [*He smokes contentedly, puffing rings.*]

BLOOMER

These are queer times . . . new times . . . think of our sons, the new generation growing up in these times—what are our sons coming to? [*Pause.*]

POPPIN

We gotta make Americans out of our sons.

EUGENE

[*Eyeing* ROGER *deliberately.*] Wait'll you get to college. Hell, what they won't do to you!

ROGER

How?

EUGENE

I remember you in High School: you was a funny kid!

ROGER

I've grown up since then.

EUGENE

Not so much, just wait till you get to college!

ROGER

I thought I'd try to play football at college.

EUGENE

Who! You! No, better stick to ping-pong.

ROGER

I mean . . . oh, never mind, I'm going home!

EUGENE

[*Laughing.*] Mamma waiting?

ROGER

[*Fists clenched, he speaks helplessly.*] I'm going home. [*Draggingly, he crosses stage and exits.* EUGENE *continues to lean listlessly against proscenium. The two elder men talk.*]

BLOOMER

Your son: he's an upstanding boy.

POPPIN

He's an American.

BLOOMER

No doubt about that! But what can I do with my boy? He's a problem, Roger . . .

POPPIN

Every boy's a problem.

BLOOMER

I want to keep my eye on him, been thinking of State College, near home, near me!

POPPIN

No: too many Socialists at these State colleges!

BLOOMER

Then what would you advise?

POPPIN

Get him out, get him to a big place where he'll learn. [*They come center in orchestra.*]

BLOOMER

You mean East?

POPPIN

That's where they've got this education game down to a science.

BLOOMER

It's a long way East.

POPPIN

It costs money.

BLOOMER

I guess I can go that!

POPPIN

Yale is the best college! Your son can go to Yale along with mine, go to Yale and be somebody.

BLOOMER

I want my son to be somebody!

POPPIN

Fathers and sons, we stick together, for Americanism and the right ideals, that's it, ain't it?

BLOOMER

That's it.

POPPIN

Say, Gene, come here.

BLOOMER

[*To* EUGENE.] Roger gone?

EUGENE

Yes, he sort of thought he'd go home.

POPPIN

All the better: want to talk to you about him.

BLOOMER

My son . . .

POPPIN

He's his father's son all right . . . bright . . .

BLOOMER

Bright, yes . . . good-natured. . . . He dreams —well, that's neither here nor there, no,—but on account of your father and me being friends, I'm thinking: send him to Yale next fall.

EUGENE

Entrance examinations?

BLOOMER

He'll pass them: he's bright! Why, he's got books you never heard of in languages that ain't.

EUGENE

I'm not bright.

BLOOMER

Why, I'll bet he could help you yourself with your lessons.

POPPIN

And you help him with all them college customs.

BLOOMER

That's it: turn and turn about.

EUGENE

Pretty green, I suppose?

BLOOMER

Green as grass . . . green, but willing, eighteen years old. [*Pause.*] I want my son to be a man!

EUGENE

Nothing finer than a Yale man.

BLOOMER

I'm sure of that.

POPPIN

[*Sentimentally, wagging his head.*] An American, that's it!

EUGENE

First off, you got to send him to the best tailor.

BLOOMER

[*Chuckling and nodding.*] Sure: say, I like you, I like your line of talk.

EUGENE

Got to give him a big allowance.

BLOOMER

I'm no tightwad.

POPPIN

[*Jovially.*] I tell you, Bloomer, he eats money.

BLOOMER

My boy's got a quiet disposition.

POPPIN

The quiet ones are the biggest spenders.

BLOOMER

Business proposition! You can't expect to make a man out of a boy for nothing. [*Wearily.*] I want to do what's right for him, you don't know how I want to do what's right for him!

EUGENE

Then you send him to Yale?

BLOOMER

Yes, I send him to Yale!

EUGENE

And you put it up to me?

BLOOMER

To smooth him out, mold . . .

POPPIN

Bloomer and me has always been business associates.

EUGENE

Then I'll be over to talk to him seriously.

POPPIN

Don't put the boy wise: in a sense a put-up job, for his own good.

BLOOMER

[*To* EUGENE.] You'll come in and advise him like a friend, is that it?

EUGENE

I'll tell him what he'd ought to know.

BLOOMER

[*Still a little doubtful.*] Nervous boy . . .

EUGENE

College'll fix him, get him among men . . . men . . .

BLOOMER

[*Rubbing his hands.*] That's it, that must be it.

EUGENE

Understand, it's like stepping into the world: competition! A man's got to make good, keep in right, learn when to keep his mouth shut, dress well, make useful friends . . . that's how college makes the American citizen!

POPPIN

That's the future talking: mark my words, Bloomer, the future's in the hands of wise guys, our sons! The young are wise guys! [*They go out.*]

The stoutish blonde stenographer raises the window shade in BLOOMER'S *office at the store, allowing the sunlight to fall straight across his desk. A solid plain desk.*

[BLOOMER'S *office occupies space which in first scene had been curtained off between the* BLOOMER *dining-room and library. These two sets are now covered with curtains,* BLOOMER'S *office alone being visible.*]

[BLOOMER *enters.*]

BLOOMER

Good morning, Emma. [*He gives her his hat, then turning.*] Come right in, Roger, my office is the same as yours. [ROGER *enters. Exit* EMMA.]

ROGER

Tell me, dad, how many girls work in this store?

BLOOMER

Forty-three: forty-three girls working for you and me. . . . Good, eh? Glad you take an interest: some day it's going to be yours. [*Pause.*] I asked you to come to the store with me this morning, thought maybe I could talk to you better here, I'm more at home here . . . h'm. . . . Have a look over the store. . . . Want you to take an interest! [*They come to front of stage.* BLOOMER *spreads his arms wide.*] Enlargements all the time. . . . Spread! That's been my motto: spread!

ROGER

It's a swell store!

BLOOMER

Quite a place, eh? Quite an up-to-date little place! [*The whole stage and auditorium are lighted. Left, a painted drop in front of where the* BLOOMER *dining room had been, gives an impression of a department store. In front of this drop, a few bales and heavy packing cases. Front right, two salesgirls are behind the notions counter. One hastily arranges articles to show how busy she is. The other stares tiredly in awed blankness. The tired girl's*

name is LOUISE. *Here and there are hung signs with pointers, "Millinery," "Kitchen Utensils," etc.*]

BLOOMER

[*Pointing to right.*] That entire side is devoted to notions and women's wear. [ROGER *stares at the salesgirls.*]

ROGER

It's a swell store. [*They pass back toward left.*]

BLOOMER

I don't believe you'll find a more complete line of merchandise even in St. Louis. Spread! Understand? [*In front of heavy bales and packing cases, left.*] I'm planning to install a music room here. . . . Magnificent, where twenty people can listen to victrolas in twenty separate compartments, listening to the world's greatest music rendered by the world's greatest artists right here in Iowa!

LOUISE

[*Behind the counter, looking at the other salesgirl.*] Kid, your hair's coming down. [*The girl with busy fingers tries to adjust it hastily.* LOUISE *reaches over the counter and picks a few packages of hair-pins.*] Use these! [*The hair is rearranged as* BLOOMER *and* ROGER *return from left to right.*]

BLOOMER

I made it, I say, made it!

ROGER

What about these, the girls?

BLOOMER

Eh, oh, them? I trained 'em, I cussed 'em into politeness. [*Near counter right, he addresses the girls paternally.*] Good morning, girls.

BOTH GIRLS

Good morning, sir.

BLOOMER

Do you always say "Sir" and "Ma'am" to the customers?

BOTH GIRLS

Yes, sir. [BLOOMER *and* ROGER *descend steps right into orchestra.*]

BLOOMER

Now I'm thinking of extending my stores throughout the state's principal towns, calling them the Buywell Stores. Get the idea? Buy Well! Good, eh? [*He slaps* ROGER *on the back.*] The Bloomer Buywell Stores!

OTHER SALESGIRL

[*With busy fingers attending to her unruly hair, comes close to* LOUISE.] Him! Old man Bloomer, he's a self-made man!

LOUISE

[*Very low, sullenly.*] I don't think much of him.

OTHER SALESGIRL

What?

LOUISE

There's stores fifteen times as big as this in New York.

OTHER SALESGIRL

[*Still thinking about it.*] This is a big store. [BLOOMER *and* ROGER *are center in orchestra.*]

BLOOMER

The store ought to explain things, the store's what I made: I want you to know your father, you're old enough to know me like I am.

ROGER

Say, I never thought of that.

BLOOMER

What it means, this store, to you and to me!

ROGER

Money, isn't that what it means?

BLOOMER

Honest merchandising, do you know what that is? Blood and sweat!

ROGER

[*Impulsively.*] Say, dad!

BLOOMER

What!

ROGER

[*After an embarrassed pause.*] It's a swell store, but I'm thinking. . . . I'd like to set to work and make something out of my blood . . . my sweat . . .

BLOOMER

But it's ready-made for you. It's my blood in you, ain't it?

ROGER

No . . .

BLOOMER

What do you mean?

ROGER

Blood and sweat!

LOUISE

I'm sick of it. [*Suddenly flashing.*] What's this town? Nothing but a village.

OTHER SALESGIRL

Thirty thousand inhabitants and the best sewerage in the state.

LOUISE

Sewers! Haven't you anything to brag about but sewers?

OTHER SALESGIRL

I was born here. You wasn't!

LOUISE

[*Mystically.*] Me for New York!

OTHER SALESGIRL

New York ain't safe.

LOUISE

All right!

OTHER SALESGIRL

I know a girl got into trouble in New York.

LOUISE

I know some got into trouble right here.

OTHER SALESGIRL

[*Hastily.*] Who'd you mean? [*They are silent as* BLOOMER *and* ROGER *return up steps, right.*]

BLOOMER

Pots and pans . . . bath-tubs . . . carpets . . . I wouldn't sell out for a million. [BLOOMER *and* ROGER *go into his office.*]

LOUISE

[*Rising and shaking her fist after them, then spreading her arms in a gesture of crucified defiance.*] Oh, what's the use? [*Lights fade, except the clear sunlight across the desk in* BLOOMER'S *office.*]

BLOOMER

Sit down. [*He and* ROGER *sit on opposite sides of the desk.*] That's me! I'm old; what about you! You're young; now there's this college business, got to think seriously.

ROGER

I have thought.

BLOOMER

So have I: what do you say to going East?

ROGER

What's that? East!

BLOOMER

Big step, college: got to go to a thoroughgoing place where they make a man out of you.

ROGER

Where's that?

BLOOMER

Yale College! What sort of place would you figure a good college to be?

ROGER

I think . . . quiet old buildings, people planning their lives under the shade of trees.

BLOOMER

I think you got the wrong idea: it's a business institution, this Yale, that's how I figure it.

ROGER

I'm nervous about this, dad, I don't know where I stand.

BLOOMER

Too much nerves: you think too much!

ROGER

I can't help it, I'm afraid of college——

BLOOMER

If you're my son, you ain't afraid—that's your future!

ROGER

Yes, my future!

BLOOMER

Where you make your friends. Manhood. . . . Way East! [*Sad and gruff.*] Sure, then Yale is the place. I'll dictate a letter to Yale College right now. [BLOOMER *rings bell on his desk.*]

ROGER

It's a University, dad.

BLOOMER

A letter to Yale University, that'll arrange it. [EMMA *enters.*] Now, then, Emma, ready. This is to Yale University.

EMMA

Who to—I mean, what person?

BLOOMER

[*Puzzled.*] Some one in authority. Leave the address blank. I'll ask Poppin. Now then: "I am an Iowa merchant, but I have a son of average intelligence" . . . eh, Roger? "Eighteen years old"

. . . h'm . . . let's see . . . [*The lights fade to darkness.*]

[*Then* BLOOMER *turns on the elaborate lamp in the* BLOOMER *sitting-room. He and* MRS. BLOOMER *seat themselves as before. He settles himself, rattling his newspaper. She sews, looking furtively at* ROGER'S *mysterious door.*]

[ROGER'S *door is in curtained space behind which* BLOOMER'S *office has been, thus forming an opening in curtains between the sitting-room and dining-room.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Frightened.*] Again tonight, he shuts himself in.

BLOOMER

Every night.

MRS. BLOOMER

What goes on?

BLOOMER

Hush . . . don't. . . . [*A long pause. He rattles his paper.*]

MAID

[*Entering.*] Here's a young man, sir. [*Enter* EUGENE POPPIN.]

BLOOMER

[*Rising and seizing* EUGENE *nervously.*] Lord, I'm glad you've come, we need you. Ma, here's Eugene Poppin, gonna be a friend to Roger. [MAID *goes out.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Puts down her sewing, adjusts her glasses, looks hard at* EUGENE.] Well, he's very quiet, Roger is.

EUGENE

Yes, ma'am.

BLOOMER

He's in his room. Been studying those college examinations. [BLOOMER *goes to* ROGER'S *door and knocks.*] Roger! Here's Gene. [ROGER *opens the door.*]

EUGENE

[*Condescendingly.*] Hello, Roger, just thought I'd drop in.

ROGER

Thanks!

BLOOMER

Been working, Roger?

ROGER

Yes, dad; Latin, French, geometry——

EUGENE

Boy, wait'll you get in that examining room, takes a man's nerve.

BLOOMER

Going to take his test right here in town—what's the name of the place?

ROGER

State College Examiner, dad.

BLOOMER

Latin, geometry . . . ah, that's a proud thing. Now get together, have a talk: Roger, take him in your room.

ROGER

We'll be more comfortable in the dining-room.

EUGENE

Anything suits me.

ROGER

In here, please.

EUGENE

[*Starts to go and remembers his manners.*] If you'll excuse, Mrs. Bloomer.

MRS. BLOOMER

Certainly. [ROGER *has turned on lights in dining room.* EUGENE *sits down left of dining room table, crossing his legs.*]

EUGENE

[*As if he owned the place.*] Sit down! [ROGER *goes around the table, draws a chair to the corner of it and sits. In the sitting room,* BLOOMER *continues to read his paper, occasionally coughing and clearing his throat.* MRS. BLOOMER *sews.* EUGENE *lights a cigarette.*]

BLOOMER

[*Half to himself.*] H'm . . . some one his own age to tell him facts.

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Adjusting her glasses.*] What do you mean by facts?

BLOOMER

H'm . . . things fellows that age talk about: baseball . . .

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Relieved.*] Ah . . .

BLOOMER

Two boys figuring out the game! [*In the other room,* ROGER *and* EUGENE *are silent. Then* EUGENE *exclaims vigorously.*]

EUGENE

Aw, come out of it!

ROGER

[*Jumping up as if he had been stung.*] What did you come here for? I know when I'm being spied on.

EUGENE

You're not being spied on, being educated.

ROGER

You look at me like you hated me.

EUGENE

I don't: it's you! think you're too good for me and the regular fellows! That won't get you anything at Yale! Buck up, be a man!

ROGER

What does that mean? [EUGENE *blows smoke rings.*]

EUGENE

[*After an appropriate silence.*] Look at me!

ROGER

I don't think so much of you.

EUGENE

I've made good at college, I'm a big man. What are you? Nothing. You're going to get hell at college. If you go on like this they'll beat you up.

ROGER

I can take a licking all right, but it's got to be from a better man than I am. [*They look at each other fixedly.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Sleepily in the other room.*] It seems like a puzzle, doesn't it? They grow so quickly. Seems like yesterday he was learning to walk . . . tomorrow . . . ?

BLOOMER

[*Grunting.*] H'm . . . tomorrow. . . .

EUGENE

[*Rising.*] I didn't come here for this kind of argument. I'm here as a friend, honest. Will you listen? [ROGER *nods.*] Buck up and listen: College is a business proposition: athletics, competition, real life . . . you're a kid, you are! I'll tell you something that's worth money to you: *why* you go to college! To make friends, that's why! Useful friends you can use all your life. Figure on it!

Stick to the guys with money and an American name and you can't go wrong . . . that's life, isn't it?

ROGER

Is that true, is that the secret?

EUGENE

I've got big friends. I'm going to spend this summer in New York among millionaires.

ROGER

[*Laughs.*] I wouldn't care so much for that.

EUGENE

Wouldn't you? Nervous, eh! I know: College'll give you a new point of view, make you contented!

ROGER

And if I don't want to be contented?

EUGENE

Don't you know discontentment of any sort is unpatriotic: you love your country, don't you? You want to get on in these United States?

ROGER

I do, I do!

EUGENE

Well, college is your first step into the United States.

ROGER

I hadn't thought of that.

EUGENE

Look at me! Senior year, I'm sure of the best club. Simple rule: I always kept away from Jews, highbrows and guys that eat with their knives! You got a suspicion of highbrow yourself that'll kill you in college! . . . If you want friends——

ROGER

[*Seizing* EUGENE'S *arm.*] I never had a friend in my life! [*Pause.* EUGENE *looks at him curiously.*]

EUGENE

What's bothering you? Cigarettes . . . coke, or women?

ROGER

[*Rising, a gesture of defiance.*] Ah . . .

EUGENE

[*In placid comprehension.*] Ah! [*In the other room,* MR. *and* MRS. BLOOMER *have been sitting*

quietly by the lamp. BLOOMER *folds his paper methodically and rises.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

I feel safer now. Roger's found a friend. [BLOOMER *yawns largely.*]

BLOOMER

I'll be off to bed.

MRS. BLOOMER

Be sure to lock the windows. [*He goes.* MRS. BLOOMER *yawns and follows him.* BLOOMER *returns, puts out the drop-light and exits again. Meanwhile the conversation in the dining room continues.*]

EUGENE

I knew a kid freshman year used to talk like you.

ROGER

What . . . what about him?

EUGENE

[*Nonchalantly.*] Oh, he went bad . . . wild . . .

ROGER

Wild?

EUGENE

Pst! . . . smashed up in a motor with some women. [*Motioning toward right, discreetly.*] Can they hear us?

ROGER

Not a word. [*Looking at watch.*] It's nine o'clock: they've gone to bed.

EUGENE

Oh, I know: I see it in your eye!

ROGER

What?

EUGENE

You talk highbrow, but it isn't that . . . oh, it isn't the bean; it's inside!

ROGER

[*Frightened.*] Inside!

EUGENE

One of those softies that go straight to Hell with skirts.

ROGER

Me? You can see that in me?

EUGENE

What do you know about women?

ROGER

I saw a burlesque show once, and I've got a copy of the Police Gazette.

EUGENE

Experience is the only thing that counts.

ROGER

[*Embarrassed.*] I never touched . . . I mean, touched . . . a girl . . .

EUGENE

Don't get excited! Oh you listen now . . . you're excited now! Women. . . . [*Pause.* ROGER *waits tensely, hands clenched.*] I'm not averse to that myself, but I keep my head, I go easy on it. There's a big difference between chasing chickens and pursuing select skirts. No champagne suppers for me! I've got lined up a couple of nice quiet girls that know just where to draw the line! Of course, it takes time and money to break 'em in, but it's worth it, boy, it's worth it . . . blondes by preference! Down to New Haven I got three or four that's worth loving! [*Pause.*]

ROGER

I shouldn't think you could love more than one.

EUGENE

I mean loving in the strictly technical sense. It all depends how far she'll go. Last year I had a little factory girl . . . quiet, but wait till you get her in the dark. She married a butcher. This year I'm travelling with a society girl, a sort of society girl. . . . [*Reminiscently.*] Passionate as a rabbit! I guess she takes on eight or ten of the boys a season.

ROGER

Don't you mind?

EUGENE

As long as it's good loving, what's the odds. One would never do for her, too passionate! Yet some way, just at the limit, she always draws the line—women are wonderful!

ROGER

Then I should think I'd want one all to myself, very completely——

EUGENE

You mean all night?

ROGER

Longer . . . longer . . . loving, to know, to talk to—they . . . they must have souls!

EUGENE

[*Sentimentally.*] Oh, I've had my dreams of a little girl strictly private . . .

ROGER

You too? You've got dreams?

EUGENE

There's nothing in that stuff—too European! It isn't safe.

ROGER

[*More to himself than* EUGENE.] Women must have souls!

EUGENE

A guy soon finds out what's good for him. Two years ago I was just like you.

ROGER

Then I shall be like you?

EUGENE

[*Cordially.*] Here's hoping! Either that or you'll go wrong——

ROGER

Then I'll go wrong, I will——

EUGENE

You've got no self-control.

ROGER

You don't understand what I mean. . . . I mean I want something, a dim passion!

EUGENE

Come out of the trance, the seance is over.

ROGER

I've made a fool of myself by telling you this.

EUGENE

You'll make a fool of yourself a lot of times; none of my business.

ROGER

[*Desperately.*] How should you know what I mean when I say passion——

EUGENE

I know what you mean all right! If you go wild like that you'll smash up inside a year: Passion you call it! That's the bad thing: take your pleasure

like a man safely: no regular man touches this passion stuff!

ROGER

[*Accepting it.*] All right, for me then!

EUGENE

[*With nonchalance.*] They say there's a hundred thousand whores in New York . . . but I've only seen one or two. Ever seen a naked woman?

ROGER

No.

EUGENE

I have.

ROGER

[*In a whisper.*] Where?

EUGENE

At a place. [EUGENE *rises and looks* ROGER *full in the face.*] For a kid, you got ambitious ideas!

ROGER

[*His voice trembling with an awful determination.*] I've told you, the whole hog or none for me in life!

EUGENE

Hog is right! Don't do it, boy: I give you

advice like a father now! Keep away from Sin: try the nice girls first, try a nice girl in the dark!

ROGER

Nice girls here don't do those things.

EUGENE

They don't advertise it. Just the same when I see a grass stain on one of those gingham dresses I know what I think.

ROGER

What about your own sister?

EUGENE

[*Firing up violently.*] You keep my sister out of it!

ROGER

[*Excitedly.*] It's your sister I want. . . . I want the impossible, I want to change things, I want women's souls—and I'll never be satisfied with less . . .. I swear. . . . Never!

EUGENE

I'm done with you then. Why, you're not even safe to talk to, can't talk like a gentleman.

ROGER

Give me passion!

EUGENE

Fool! Fool! Where will you end, on what ash-heap? I've done what I could, stay alone then with your passion. [EUGENE *goes.*] ROGER *suddenly becomes perfectly stiff, thinking, hands clenched. Then he turns out light in dining room, crosses stage in the pale gloom and opens the door of his room. Light comes from the opened door. He goes in and closes the door. In the darkness an oblique ray of light from above falls center on* ROGER. *Around him shadows. Near him the tail of a curtain, purple-blue covered with black symbols of monsters, trails on the fringe of the light.*]

ROGER

Alone with my passion! [*Slowly weighing his thoughts.*] So that's it, that's what's in the hearts of these wise solid people that I fear so—and envy! They have everything, they have friends, while I stand alone, with my passion alone! asking my everlasting why! wanting to find out everything, to see, to know, to touch life, to lay both hands upon it as if it were a woman, crush it to me with my fingers in the warm flesh lovingly— [*He stands before the mysterious curtain spreading his arms wide.*] Life like a curtain before me, a curtain figured with beasts. You shake the cloth and they squirm

strangely, but behind the curtain, behind, what mystical things? [*He starts to open it and retreats.*] I believe intensely that behind the curtain of life there is luminous purity, beauty . . . passionate beauty. [*Pause.*] For I have accepted passion and my heart beats— I can't let myself go like this: if I shut my eyes my imagination is a mad horse trampling me down . . . the room is filled with ghosts and flame-like shadows, and I can see them with my eyes, cynical ghosts licking me with tiny tongues of flame. [*He moves about the room—suddenly stopping.*] That's white magic! And there's magic behind the curtain! Behind the curtain, a maiden with a dulcimer, rubies in her gold hair, her face pink, her arms pink, pink breasts bared to me—[*bitterly*] she too knowing just where to draw the line— Come out to me, then, come out, whoever you are . . . magic girl, melting girl— [*He throws the curtain wide. Behind it, shelves upon shelves of books.*] So that's the end of magic . . . nothing but books, old books! I ask life for its secret and dusty books come to me grinning! Then help me, help me now when I need you. . . . Shelley. . . . [*He picks the book from the shelf.*] Oh, there were others whose hearts were unquiet, fighting ghosts in the night . . . you and I, Shelley, you and I. . . . [*He opens the book.*] "Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun." . . . But I have a body— [*He feels*

his body all over with a tragic sense of flesh. Then he almost tears the book in a revulsion of feeling and throws it away laughing. He blows his nose healthily.] I've got my health—away with ghosts—away. [*Waving them off.*] I'm a man. It's poetry that gets me into trouble. Shelley knew nothing. Shelley was pure spirit. Shelley never read the Police Gazette! [*From behind the shelves he draws out a copy of the* Police Gazette.] That's healthy anyway; it's full of prize fighters and girls— [*He turns over the pages eagerly.*] Girls waving their legs and sticking out their stomachs, and fat, strong, naked men— Maybe I could be a prize fighter— [*Feeling his muscles thoughtfully. Finding something in the magazine.*] "Loss of Will!" What is the will of man? "Loss of Manhood." My God, what is manhood, how do you lose it? . . . Manhood— [*Slapping his chest.*] That's me, that's me— [*Finding something new in the magazine.*] "Life's secret, physiology of Sex!" [*He gasps.*] "Seventy-five pages in plain envelope." That's how my father and mother made me— [*A grim bitter smile.*] Surely there was no hot flesh, no fevered reaching in that . . . but like the dinner table, with a little talk of the weather and the high cost of living, calmly . . . calmly . . . and yet from them I came . . . my hot flesh was born! Myself, against all these generations, I mocking, asking . . .

red with fever tossing in the night . . . alone till the dawn brings laughter. . . . I myself, fighting my body, denying my body . . . a man is made out of flesh and passion! All right. . . . Come on, you damned ghosts, come on, you laughing shadows, I'm strong and alone, and somehow . . . I'll beat you yet! [*Total darkness.*]

In a long curtained room the COLLEGE EXAMINER *sits at a desk on a raised dais. He is a little grey man in flowing black collegiate robes lined with purple; a fantastic figure; on his owl-like head a mortar board. He sits on a throne-like chair. On the wall behind him an enormous map of the United States.*

[EXAMINER'S *dais occupies space at extreme right where* BLOOMER *sitting-room had been. This change of furniture behind curtains, substituting* EXAMINER'S *dais for library table, is the only change of set required in the course of* ACT I.]

ROGER *enters left, and slowly crosses stage to the* EXAMINER'S *desk, papers in his hand.*

EXAMINER

[*Looking up, kindly but brisk.*] You can't be through yet, you've only been writing an hour.

ROGER

I'm not through, but——

EXAMINER

Address me as Mr. Examiner.

ROGER

Mr. Examiner——

EXAMINER

What's that in your hand?

ROGER

It's my College Entrance Examination in American History: I can't go on!

EXAMINER

What?

ROGER

I can't . . . for four days, I've been sitting here writing, gathering my thoughts—I'm going mad, I have no thoughts——

EXAMINER

What's your name?

ROGER

Roger Bloomer.

EXAMINER

Age?

ROGER

Eighteen.

EXAMINER

[*Leaning over desk and waving a long ruler as if it were a weapon.*] Nerves! What's the use of nerves? I haven't any nerves——

ROGER

I can't go on.

EXAMINER

Then you can't go to college.

ROGER

I've been writing, writing . . . Latin . . . French and Geometry—I don't know what's true and what's false.

EXAMINER

That happens: put your head in cold water and then go on.

ROGER

I can't, I won't!

EXAMINER

[*Rising majestically.*] Are you a man? [*He waves long ruler at map of the United States.*] All

over the United States today boys are sitting at desks, answering, getting on, into college and on . . .

ROGER

Lies! They're telling lies——

EXAMINER

I'm authority here: as a Supreme Court Judge sits at his desk, I sit at mine! This is the climax of your youth and you funk it, you come to me in a state of nerves: haven't you any Will? Haven't you any Manhood?

ROGER

What is the Will of Man?

EXAMINER

Obedience and competitive ambition. Stop and think: College is your first step into the United States and you begin by defying authority. Take that examination and write it like a man. [ROGER *stands stiff, looking fixedly at the* EXAMINER *and shakes his head.*]

ROGER

I can refuse, I am able to refuse!

EXAMINER

Where will you end in life if you start like this?

ROGER

How do I know? There are so many people in black sitting on thrones, so many judges! They crammed my head full of lies to write an examination paper—I can't do it! I can't remember the lies! [*He turns away.*]

EXAMINER

[*In magisterial fashion.*] This is definitive: leave this room and your chance of college ends: Never again! [ROGER *turns and tears his paper into bits.*]

ROGER

There, then: it's lies, full of lies!

EXAMINER

Is this our young manhood, eh? Is this America in the making? Anarchical, absolutely anarchical! We won't have emotions here. [*Pause. He looks at* ROGER *fixedly.*] Is this a defiance? [ROGER *nods and returns the* EXAMINER'S *fixed look.*] I shall remember this if we meet again! Defiance! Get out then . . . very quietly. . . .

The store is in full swing. BLOOMER *at his desk in the private office.* LOUISE *and the* OTHER SALESGIRL *behind the Notions Counter, right.*

LOUISE

I can't stand this a minute longer.

OTHER SALESGIRL

They all say that——

LOUISE

[*Her violence increasing.*] My God, but I'm sick of everything! [*She brushes her hand across the counter violently.*]

OTHER SALESGIRL

[*Grabbing her arm firmly.*] Careful! [LOUISE *falls across the counter sobbing. At the same moment, enter* ROGER *right in great excitemenet. The* OTHER SALESGIRL *nervously pats* LOUISE'S *head.*] Don't .... don't . . . don't . . . don't!

ROGER

What's that? She? Is she crying?

OTHER SALESGIRL

I don't know. [*A tremor of sobbing shakes* LOUISE'S *whole body. The* OTHER SALESGIRL *is apologetic.*] Maybe she's tired: it's the Spring.

ROGER

Me too. . . . [*He pulls himself together and goes into his father's office.*]

OTHER SALESGIRL

Careful, dearie, you'll get the hair-nets wet. [*The exterior lights fade, leaving* BLOOMER'S *office alone visible.*]

ROGER

[*In the inner office.*] I'm all in, dad, I'm done.

BLOOMER

[*In the office, calmly.*] Anything important? [ROGER *is silent.*] Out with it, I'm a busy man.

ROGER

Not going to college, that's all, I'm done with it.

BLOOMER

[*Pointing angrily to chair.*] Sit down there, sit down! What's wrong with you?

ROGER

I sassed the examiner, got thrown out of the examining room.

BLOOMER

What'll your mother say?

ROGER

I told her. She cried.

BLOOMER

And doesn't that mean anything to you, to make your mother cry, at her age?

ROGER

I can't help it.

BLOOMER

Can't you help anything? Can't you be a man? [*Pause.* ROGER'S *hands twist on the sunlit desk.*] I asked you a question.

ROGER

What's being a man?

BLOOMER

Not to be afraid, I'd say.

ROGER

I'm not afraid.

BLOOMER

Eh . . . ?

ROGER

I wasn't afraid of the Examiner, I sassed him—I'm not afraid of you!

BLOOMER

Go on, sass me!

ROGER

I've got to get away: if I could travel . . .

BLOOMER

Travel! [*He laughs with genuine amusement.*] Do you think you're a young duke?

ROGER

I can't stay here, I need to move.

BLOOMER

This is a live city, there's plenty of movement right here.

ROGER

I know this place, I know the streets, faces: I want what I don't know.

BLOOMER

You don't know what you want! Too much alone! It's no good. I know that, though you may think I'm a fool.

ROGER

You're right, dad.

BLOOMER

Oh, you do think I'm a fool?

ROGER

No, you're right about being alone. That's why I want to get out among people.

BLOOMER

There's thirty thousand people here.

ROGER

[*Sitting down exhausted.*] I can't make you see.

BLOOMER

See what?

ROGER

The splendor of strange places.

BLOOMER

[*With a chuckle.*] Bagdad, eh?

ROGER

Why not? [*The only answer is a grunt.*] That's in my head, Bagdad and all the other places.

BLOOMER

You'll stick right here, face the music here.

ROGER

Will I? You may wake up in the morning to find me gone! [*The stenographer enters.*]

BLOOMER

Well, Emma?

EMMA

One of the salesgirls is waiting to see you, sir.

BLOOMER

Send her in when I ring. [*Exit* EMMA. ROGER *moves as if to go.*] No, no! Wait. [*Seriously he leans over* ROGER, *patting his shoulder.*] Life is not an illustrated edition of the Arabian Nights.

ROGER

I don't know what life is: I want to find out, face it . . . the whole hog.

BLOOMER

What's that about a hog? Make friends, mix with boys your own age, you'll learn from them——

ROGER

A lot of dirty stories.

BLOOMER

All right. What do you suppose I listen to at the club once a week? Same stories! And I laugh; yes, and they're telling those same dirty stories right now in Bagdad. Because Bagdad is just like little old Iowa, except it smells worse because the sewerage

is rotten. [*He rings bell on his desk.* LOUISE *enters. She stands meekly before* BLOOMER *who looks her over from head to foot.*] Well?

LOUISE

I want to resign.

BLOOMER

Without notice in advance?

LOUISE

Right away.

BLOOMER

Why?

LOUISE

[*Smiling wanly with a puzzled gesture.*] Tired. [BLOOMER *looks at his watch.*]

BLOOMER

Four-forty. [*He scribbles on a piece of paper.*] Here's an order for your pay up to four-forty-five.

LOUISE

Thanks. [*She starts to go.*]

BLOOMER

Come back here. Are you under the impression that you haven't been paid enough?

LOUISE

It's not much, but I'd say at that it was more than I deserved.

BLOOMER

Then why quit? Cultivate habits of industry and earn more pay. [LOUISE *laughs unexpectedly.*]

LOUISE

What would I have at the end of a year? A dollar a week raise and consumption. . . . I'm too proud! You and your store ain't worth it. [*Raising both her hands against him defiantly.*] Don't start asking me questions or I might tell you what I think, 'cause I'm so tired. . . . [*She goes out with real dignity.* BLOOMER *turns on* ROGER *with great energy.*]

BLOOMER

Life! There's life for you. That girl goes out of here to starvation and the gutter—why? Because she won't put up with things like they are . . . nervous, something different!

ROGER

[*Thinking.*] There's life for you.

BLOOMER

I can't help her. . . . Sorry, but I can't. But it's life before your eyes, you can't beat it in Bagdad. [*Pause.*] Can't you learn a lesson?

ROGER

Slowly, slowly I learn things. . . . Good-bye, dad. [ROGER *exits. Enter* EMMA *with papers.*]

BLOOMER

Emma, am I an old man?

EMMA

Oh no, sir.

BLOOMER

You're wrong. I'm old and I'm feeble. [*Motioning her away.*] Take away the papers. Not now. . . . [*He sits down.* EMMA *retires astonished.*]

Before the Outer Curtain.

[*Enter* LOUISE, *right. She takes off her hat, breathes the air with a deep relief.* ROGER *enters right.*]

ROGER

Thank God I've found you.

LOUISE

Can't you leave me in peace in the sunshine?

ROGER

I am Roger Bloomer, son of Everett Bloomer. I followed you from my father's office.

LOUISE

What do you do?

ROGER

I chase rainbows . . . and you!

LOUISE

Me, I'm no rainbow.

ROGER

Yes you are because my desire followed you, fol-.owed you——

LOOUISE

[*Frightened.*] What?

ROGER

There's something between us. We both hate my father.

LOUISE

Do you hate him?

ROGER

Two years ago I cried with loving him. Now all that's turned to dust . . . but there's something else.

LOUISE

What is it?

ROGER

[*Dreamily.*] Never to be satisfied with things as they are . . . nervous. . . . [*She is silent, uncertain.* ROGER *goes on desperately.*] When you went out of my father's office just now, something in me answered your feeling . . . a burning sensation more than tears! For the first time in my life I heard a despairing cry, like children being born, like . . . [LOUISE *gives a short sob, dabbing at her eyes.*] It's true, it's true!

LOUISE

What?

ROGER

We answered each other: wanting something just out of sight, just around the corner!

LOUISE

[*Facing him.*] What's in your head?

ROGER

Don't go back on me. Do you think it was easy to follow you like this? attack you——

LOUISE

Attack is right, it's an attack all right!

ROGER

I've come to you like this straight out, asking you . . . wanting——

LOUISE

Wanting, eh? What do you suppose I want, I . . . a girl?

ROGER

Answer me, tell me! You've got to now!

LOUISE

Don't get excited——

ROGER

I will be excited—I will find life, find it where it hides, take life for what it's worth. . . . I followed you because you went out of my father's office wearing life like a cloak around you——

LOUISE

Go away from me, go away— [*They are at steps, left. She goes to center of stage.* ROGER *goes down steps, standing center in orchestra beneath stage at her feet.*]

ROGER

Tell me what you want! Is it love? Is it?

LOUISE

Love! It's a swell fake, love is! You see with a girl, she either does or she don't. . . . Love, if you want to be cute and call it that, don't bother me a bit. Oh, if there were only that to bother about!

ROGER

Oh, but I do, I bother about it quite a lot.

LOUISE

If you'd ever been hungry, you'd know how little difference men and women make—those things aren't clean!

ROGER

Ah . . .

LOUISE

They mean nothing to me but disgust! *You* disgust me with that little look of curiosity. . . . Oh,

you're a man, it's in the blood! It's been like that always, men trying to get away with something, women keeping cool and saying No: that's all there is to this here pure love! A woman saying No till the man gets sore and marries her!

ROGER

Sometime it'll hit you . . . Love, whatever you call it!

LOUISE

Me, as you see me now standing in front of you, I'd rather die than let a man have me, married or any other way, so help me God! Never! Never! Never!—Remember that!

ROGER

That's awful.

LOUISE

It's me! . . . I hate it, I tell you, I hate it.

ROGER

Almost seems like hating life itself.

LOUISE

I do! I refuse! [*Pause.* ROGER *sits on steps, right.*]

ROGER

[*Dreamily.*] Never to be satisfied with things as they are, wanting something different: and my father said, that means starvation, the gutter——

LOUISE

[*Coming nearer to him.*] You're in the magazine section, turn over to the comic page.

ROGER

I can't forget it, because there in a flash, like in a moving picture theater, I saw you against my father . . . you against the others . . .you against the wise people, splendidly foolish! That's unforgetable, that is! [*Pause.*] Here we are, you and me in Iowa!

LOUISE

It's a dead hole.

ROGER

But just over the hill there's Bagdad, Samarcand and Bessarabia.

LOUISE

Never heard of 'em, but every place is dead, every place is lonely, hating alone—and just the same you've got to move, because there's something in you that says: Move, Move! [*She opens her vanity*

case, straightening her hat, etc.] So it's New York, it's New York next!

ROGER

[*Awed.*] You're going to New York? That's magnificent, that is.

LOUISE

Don't fool yourself. You're a dreamy kid, dream till your mouth is full of sand! I've got money enough for the train; New York's the same as here. I've got an aunt there that I hate, it'll be lonely, hating alone!

ROGER

Me too, me for New York!

LOUISE

[*Hastily, excited.*] Don't do it, dreamy kid, hold onto what you've got, love your family.

ROGER

That's not love, maybe there's love in New York!

LOUISE

Humph!

ROGER

I'll find out, find life where it hides, I will . . .

LOUISE

What is it that makes us wild? What is it? Oh, if I could just sit here, smelling the smell of flowers . . .

ROGER

But more flowers, stranger smells . . . the desire of the world upon me, to bury myself in apple blossoms, to melt into the sun like a bird, to wear a dress suit on Broadway. . . . [*The scene has grown darker. A red gold light from the setting sun.*]

LOUISE

The sun is setting.

ROGER

Give me your address in New York, we'll see what luck brings to you and to me!

LOUISE

What luck! [*She silently takes a slip of paper from vanity case and writes on it.*] My address in New York.

ROGER

I'll take some of my father's money: he owes me that—and be off chasing destinies.

LOUISE

New York'll kill you . . . you can't stand it, it'll kill you, honest!

ROGER

Ah, but to die like the sun in red splendor! [*They go to opposite sides of the stage.*]

LOUISE

Good-by. . . . Luck!

ROGER

Luck to you! [*They raise their hands and go.*]

Evening. An oblique ray of moonlight shines on the exterior of an open window with lace curtains. The window is two feet above the ground. The shade is drawn. Inside a light.

[*This window is set in curtains center, in front of space occupied by* BLOOMER'S *office at the store.*]

A figure comes to the window, silhouetted stoutly for a moment, then raises the shade. It is BLOOMER.

BLOOMER

There's heat lightning in the air. . . . Bad. . . . Roger, come here, Roger. Take a look at that sky. [ROGER *joins him at the window.*]

ROGER

Pretty moon, eh, dad?

BLOOMER

You can't buy it or sell it, what's the good of it? [*He looks at his watch.*] Nine o'clock. Ask your mother if she wants to go up to bed.

ROGER

[*Turning into room.*] Mother. [MRS. BLOOMER *comes near the window, peeking around her husband's shoulder.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

Is there going to be a storm tonight, Everett?

BLOOMER

H'mm . . . little storm . . . [ROGER *beside his mother,* MRS. BLOOMER *takes an arm of each.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

[*In her twittering voice.*] I'm almost glad you're not going to college, Roger. It keeps the three of us together, that's nice, isn't it? The three of us together.

ROGER

Yes, mother. [ROGER *goes away from the window.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

So there's going to be a storm. Then close the window carefully.

BLOOMER

I always close the window carefully. [*He does so. Then he draws the shade. The light is turned off inside. After a moment,* ROGER *throws open the window. He climbs out carrying hat, coat and small bag. He shakes his fist at the house, for there is no sentiment in his going, but a sullen anger. Stirred by the wind, the lace curtains flap out white in the moonlight.* ROGER *moves into shadow. For a moment his raised clenched hand is still visible in the moonlight. The wind increases. A cloud obscures the moon. Absolute darkness. Silence. Then the long whistle of a train in the night.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

NEW YORK

ACT II

SCENE—*The Outer Curtain of Act II is grey, blotched with great masses of houses, geometrical and perpendicular tumbled magnificently, an impression of New York.*

The curtain opens on a boarding-house room: a mantel, a table and garish wall paper. A pathetic mess of papers on the table. At it, his back to the light which gilds his shoulders and reflects his shadow on wall, sits ROGER. *His collar soiled, hair unkempt.*

Behind him, enter a FAT LANDLADY, *looking very much as if she were a piece of the wall paper come to life. A loose garish dress under which her big flabby breasts shake like jellies. About her the general greasiness of a frumpy kitchen. A languishing quality in her broken voice. She carries a duster. She looks at* ROGER, *arms akimbo. She begins dusting all around him. Then, surprised at his not noticing her, she tickles the back of his head with the duster. He turns, she steps back grandly and they stare at one another.*]

LANDLADY

I bet you ain't got the price of a piece of bread.

ROGER

I have a little money still, and I've paid for the room another week in advance, haven't I?

LANDLADY

Poor boy! You young an' no mother, a boy without a mother, alone in New York, that touches the heart.

ROGER

I have a mother . . . at home!

LANDLADY

Long way off, ain't it?

ROGER

Iowa.

LANDLADY

An' you here alone.

ROGER

It's a month now.

LANDLADY

I s'pose you're writin' to your mother now, writin' for money, I s'pose. [*She picks up a piece of paper on the table.*]

ROGER

No you don't, don't touch it, keep away.

LANDLADY

Wha'd'you sit here writin' for, all day long?

ROGER

I'm writing things very important and personal, things essential to me.

LANDLADY

My Gawd, are you an anarchist?

ROGER

These are poems.

LANDLADY

Poems me eye! [*She laughs coarsely and sits with her legs wide apart, shaking like a jelly.*] Aw now, read us a bit!

ROGER

[*Desperately.*] Leave me alone, I'm fighting something alone . . . fighting!

LANDLADY

Is that your poem? [ROGER, *staring straight in front of him, nods.*]

ROGER

That's my poem.

LANDLADY

Lonely?

ROGER

Lonely . . . no, I guess that's not it.

LANDLADY

You don't get away with your bluff very well.

ROGER

I'm not bluffing.

LANDLADY

Everybody in this burg is bluffin' . . . you a man! You're just a homesick kid, dead homesick, ready to cry, huh? [*She pats his cheek with her greasy hand.*]

ROGER

Awfully nice of you.

LANDLADY

I could be a mother to you, come to the kitchen an' have some cabbage.

ROGER

I . . . I mean, why should you treat me like this?

LANDLADY

'Cause I'm lonely too . . . t'aint all roses in a boarding house, I may be fat but what about my mother's heart! A pure kid like you hits me right in the heart, that's where you hit me. [*She indicates her capacious bosom.*] Feel! [*He touches her gingerly and removes his hand.*] Feel again! Pure! That's what I like about you, 'cause I know you'll understand, like a mother talkin'. . . . [*She sits in an inviting attitude.*] Some men if you talk friendly wants to jump on you an' do somethin' bad before you could say boo . . . you ain't like that, you take things friendly, gradual-like.

ROGER

So that's it.

LANDLADY

I could teach you things, stick to the fat ones, you can't go wrong!

ROGER

[*Turning from her.*] Is this what I came for, is this passion?

LANDLADY

What's that?

ROGER

I was just thinking, New York's different from what I expected.

LANDLADY

You thought there'd be women with diamonds askin' you to sit on their knees! Better take what you can get. [*She laughs coarsely.*] Don't you never laugh?

ROGER

Not since I came to New York.

LANDLADY

In this town we take what we can get, we ain't so skittish here as where you come from. Sit here [*she indicates her knee*] an' kiss me!

ROGER

I'd as soon kiss a horse.

LANDLADY

[*Rising in majestic rage.*] Wha'd'you mean, you little whippersnapper, you! 'Cause I treat you like a mother, you think I'm after somethin' wrong with you—an' if I was—[*pausing for breath*] if I was, you think I'd ask you, why I'd walk in an' take you in your bed like you'd crack a nut, an' it would be done that job before you could whisper mama. . . . [ROGER *has been gathering up his poems from table and putting them in his pockets.*] An' I got half a mind to do it now, just to learn you what you'd oughter know.

ROGER

For God's sake, let me out.

LANDLADY

Aw, that gets your nerve, that shows you. [ROGER *circles. She pursues him with duster. By-play.*]

ROGER

Let me out.

LANDLADY

Why should I, huh, why should I?

ROGER

[*Face to face with the panting woman, suddenly laughs.*] But you're being foolish, don't you know you're being foolish—you've made me laugh. [LANDLADY *suddenly collapses like a blown bubble.*]

LANDLADY

[*Sitting, touched.*] That's true, that's true.

ROGER

What's the use of making things worse by cutting up rough—I can't give you what you want, try the iceman!

LANDLADY

I have tried him! You don't know what it is to be a widow with an unquenched heart.

ROGER

I'll send for my suitcase.

LANDLADY

Go on, go out in the street, boy you'll be back in a week askin' to sit on my knee! You can't stand New York, it'll get you, mind, kill you, mind! You're too skittish for New York! [ROGER *goes,* LANDLADY *continues emotionally.*] Don't forget . . . don't forget the old girl with the mother's heart!

Outer Curtain closes on her.

The flat where LOUISE *lives with her aunt.* [*The sort of mantelpiece that grows in cheap flats. Under it gas logs not lighted. Over it a mirror. In front of it a table. At rear a window, at the left an old couch.*

A sweet old lady with white hair sits by window in the gloaming. Enter LOUISE. *She lights electric lamps with green shades on either side of mantel. She takes off her hat tiredly.*]

LOUISE

Hello, auntie, isn't it awful hot?

MISS BURNS

I just been sitting here in the gloaming thinking about God.

LOUISE

[*Gives a short laugh and sits down.*] I been working at the office for our bread and butter.

MISS BURNS

God's ways are inscrutable.

LOUISE

[*Sarcastic.*] Yes they are! It's late. [MISS BURNS *rises.*]

MISS BURNS

Supper's on the fire. [*Doorbell rings.*] Sit still, dearie, I'll go. [MISS BURNS *goes.*]

ROGER'S VOICE

[*Off stage.*] I must see her, I must. . . . [*And* MISS BURNS' *voice protesting.* ROGER *pushes* MISS BURNS *before him.* ROGER *and* LOUISE *stand facing each other.*]

ROGER

[*Twisting hat in hand, his voice trembling with emotion.*] You remember me . . . well, I've come to you . . .

LOUISE

Springtime in Iowa and the apple blossoms were like snow.

ROGER

And you said, if you go to New York, you'll die, you said. . . . I've come, I've come alone . . . but you were right.

LOUISE

You're not dead.

ROGER

[*Smiling.*] Pretty near.

LOUISE

Oh, so am I, near enough. We, none of us, keeps more'n a stone's throw ahead of . . . it.

MISS BURNS

Ahead of what?

ROGER

Death.

MISS BURNS

Oh, that frightens a body!

LOUISE

This is my aunt, Miss Burns.

ROGER

Guess I frightened you, ma'am.

MISS BURNS

Small wonder, you've got a look .

LOUISE

Hungry! I know that look, I'll get you some bread and butter till dinner's ready.

ROGER

Thanks. [LOUISE *goes.*]

MISS BURNS

So you knew Louise out to Iowa?

ROGER

[*Impulsively, coming close to her.*] You're like the people out in Iowa, kind and simple. I didn't know people were like that in New York.

MISS BURNS

You talk like a decent clean young boy. [MISS BURNS *putters about, putting table cloth and dishes on table.*]

ROGER

Thank you, ma'am.

MISS BURNS

Take heed in this city, there's dangers here. I hope you love your mother.

ROGER

Why do you say that?

MISS BURNS

If you love your mother, you're safe at the ends of the earth, isn't it so?

ROGER

My mother looks something like you, ma'am.

MISS BURNS

That's good, to be told I'm like a boy's mother, that makes it worth while.

ROGER

What?

MISS BURNS

I'm a maiden lady, Miss Burns is the name, *Miss* Burns.

ROGER

Yes, ma'am. [LOUISE *returns with bread and butter on a plate.* ROGER *eats eagerly like one in great hunger.*]

LOUISE

Look after the dinner will you, auntie. I want to talk to my friend.

MISS BURNS

He says I look like his mother. [LOUISE *laughs an unexpected bitter laugh.*]

ROGER

Yes, indeed.

MISS BURNS

I know what it means, the old caring for the young in the rough places, I've tried to be a mother to Louise. [*She exits.* LOUISE *comes nearer to* ROGER.]

LOUISE

What do you want of me now?

ROGER

Remember that afternoon?

LOUISE

Do I? Ask me!

ROGER

The sun setting and the portent of disaster.

LOUISE

But nothing happened, nothing ever happens.

ROGER

You stood on a long road and you had the sun perched red on your shoulder, you cried out loud——

LOUISE

Aw, don't——

ROGER

You said, I'm tired, I hate life. . . . Now I've come, now I know what you meant.

LOUISE

What does that matter now? This isn't Iowa . . . this is little old New York. . . . Aren't the buildings high?

ROGER

Immense.

LOUISE

Made of stone . . . it's not like a dusty road with Bagdad just over the hill.

ROGER

No, not here.

LOUISE

I been here long enough to get the habit. Right off the bat I got a good job . . . luck! I run to

the subway every morning. If I'm two minutes late I lose my job, then I starve.

ROGER

It's like a nightmare in the streets, millions hurrying, diving into the pit of the subway . . . blind . . .

LOUISE

They're not blind, they see their bread and butter —so it's hurry, hurry. . . .

ROGER

Makes me feel like a ghost.

LOUISE

Me too . . . two ghosts of Springtime.

ROGER

Once you taught me what hating is. What can you teach me now? Here in the city of Hate?

LOUISE

I been thinking since I came to New York! there's one thing that beats out Hate, sets you above tiredness—Money! This town makes you think . . . Money!

ROGER

Why should you worry about that? You're not alone like me, you've got a home.

LOUISE

You call this home? That old woman, if you knew how I hate her. . . . I don't say anything, try to be nice, I haven't busted out . . . not yet . . . but some day, oh, I might kill her——

ROGER

Why?

LOUISE

She's old and sweet, she's got an old head full of musty, dusty things . . . what are those things to me? She's against me, she hates me, and she's sentimental!

ROGER

She said a mother to you——

LOUISE

She lives off me if that's what you mean. She hasn't got a cent, and with all that she's superstitious, thinks there's angels and demons over her bed at night.

ROGER

Maybe there are.

LOUISE

I'd like to catch an angel snooping around my bed! She dreams dreams, and she figures them out this way that way for days—that's not healthy in these hard times.

ROGER

She belongs to other softer times.

LOUISE

Not me! I hate old soft people. Her head's full of proverbs and deaths—am I to be dragged to my grave by her memories? I hate everyone. . . . I hate my own mother that's dead.

ROGER

Lives separate, lives come together, no one knows why! [*Pause.*] You said you had a good job.

LOUISE

Swell! I started as a sort of office girl, assistant to the Boss's stenographer . . . big broker on Wall Street. But the Boss took to me, he took one squint at me and he says, that girl is executive . . . me

executive! He raised me two bucks per week. Now I run the files in the private office.

ROGER

They treat you well?

LOUISE

Yes, the Boss is white all right, free lunch! Why, they give you a medical examination once a week as if you was a prize horse. Honest, it's an elegant job.

ROGER

Then you're happy, aren't you?

LOUISE

Hunger's more'n bread and butter, it's all the pretty things, it's money! I tell you, it's money. Listen, kid, lonely kid, what'll you do?

ROGER

Oh, I'm all right.

LOUISE

I ain't so sure.

ROGER

I'll try to get a job.

LOUISE

It's everyone for himself in this town.

ROGER

Maybe I'll get rich.

LOUISE

That's it, heads up! Maybe I could get you a job in my office, swell office, mahogany and all.

ROGER

Why should you do that?

LOUISE

Them that's seen despair together must stand by each other. You must come, get in the crowd, get in the subway, get in the procession.

ROGER

Where does that lead?

LOUISE

Lead! It's a kind of a dance of death. . . . MISS BURNS *enters carrying baked beans and one boiled potato apiece. She hastily sets another place.* LOUISE *puts her fingers on her lips.*]

MISS BURNS

Of course you'll share our humble meal.

LOUISE

Of course.

ROGER

Thanks, hungry . . . thanks. [*The two take their places, one on either side of* MISS BURNS *who stands.*]

MISS BURNS

Our Holy Father and Lord Jesus, bless the bread which we are about to break in humbleness! Bless this young woman and this young man, humbly content with thy strange ways, asking no impossible favors, unworthily craving Thy grace. . . . Amen.

Before the Outer Curtain.

[ROGER *and* LOUISE *are on their way to the Office.*]

LOUISE

The big boss is going to see you himself. Tell him you've had a little experience.

ROGER

Don't worry, I won't be afraid of him.

LOUISE

Talk the New York way: I'm it, I know it all, that's how they talk in this town. Are your clothes all right?

ROGER

They're all I've got, I guess they'll have to do.

LOUISE

I'm sure he'll give you a job, he must—fix your tie: there, that's better.

ROGER

Come on then. [*They hurry along.*]

Across the greater part of the stage, a series of little offices, doors opening from one to the other. In each a desk lighted by a green drop-light. At each desk a man bending over papers. There are five little rooms. [*This solid set has been ready throughout* ACT II, *occupying space behind curtain.*]

These men are very busy, and in spite of the fact that they are separated by partitions, they all move in unison like wax-works throughout the scene, turn over papers, pick up telephones, rise and walk around their desks at stated intervals with appearance of organized haste, giving impression of choral movement. In each room, a telephone at a long distance from the desk on an adjustable arm that pulls out and in.

At extreme left a larger office in which sits ELLIOTT T. RUMSEY *at a more ornamental desk. A tall, stiff man of fifty. Through a window behind his head, the flat, unbroken wall of another building.*

At extreme right appear ROGER *and* LOUISE.

LOUISE

[*In a whisper to* ROGER.] That is it, this is where they make the money.

RUMSEY

[*Dictating in a staccato voice into a dictaphone.*] Seventeen billion, six hundred million, eight hundred and forty-two thousand, two hundred and eleven . . . [*he pauses, scratching his head*] er . . . kronon. . . . [*They come to the first office, where the man at the desk looks up.*]

LOUISE

An appointment with Mr. Rumsey. [*Man nods and motions to next door. This exact procedure is repeated in each of the little offices.*] An appointment with Mr. Rumsey. [*Man at second desk motions them on. They come to third office.*] An appointment with Mr. Rumsey. [*They reach the fourth office.*]

RUMSEY

[*Dictating.*] Six million . . . er . . . marks, fourteen hundred thousand . . . er . . . yen. . . . [RUMSEY *rings bell on his desk and man in fifth office goes into* RUMSEY'S *room and stands stiff at desk.* LOUISE *and* ROGER *enter the empty fifth office.*]

ROGER

It's like a church, one chapel to another, each holier, and in the holy of holies a priest at a desk. Think of trying to get out, opening endless doors, trying to escape!

LOUISE

But they make money here, lots of money. [*The man comes out of* RUMSEY'S *office and motions them in. They enter.*]

RUMSEY

Seventeen thousand. . . . [*He stops abruptly, addresses them, his voice smooth and passionless.*] Come here, nearer the desk. [*Pause. He consults a paper on his desk.*] Roger Bloomer, eh?

ROGER

I've come to you looking for work, I need work.

RUMSEY

I consider your application because you are recommended by Miss Chamberlain. Miss Chamberlain has shown herself efficient and executive. I believe in the personal touch with my employees, I know the people who work for me, body and soul, if I may so express myself.

LOUISE

I can tell you, sir, Mr. Bloomer is intelligent and reliable, we were acquainted in Excelsior, Iowa, where his father is a prominent man——

RUMSEY

[*Cutting her off.*] That's enough. Let the young man speak: Age?

ROGER

Eighteen.

RUMSEY

What are you doing in New York?

ROGER

I've gone hungry, I've walked the streets and I want work.

RUMSEY

[*Rubbing his hands.*] Not so easy to make money, eh? A little starving is good for boys like you, brings you round, eh, Miss Chamberlain? [*He chuckles.*]

LOUISE

Yes, sir, a little starving is good.

ROGER

I want work. [*Each man in each of the five rooms rises simultaneously, picks a sheet of pink*

paper out of a file, and returns to his desk consulting it.]

RUMSEY

[*Chuckling.*] H'm . . . everybody wants . . . what good are you? Take a look at the big buildings, see your real size. [*The five men in the five offices begin taking papers out of drawers, piling them up on the desks higher, higher.*]

ROGER

I want a chance to make good.

RUMSEY

[*Looks at* ROGER *fixedly, then shakes head definitely, turning back to papers on his desk—after a moment.*] No! Go and starve some more.

ROGER

Must I?

RUMSEY

[*Looking up as if explaining to a child.*] Unreliable, nervous, careless appearance . . . why your clothes aren't clean . . . sorry to tell you, for your own good—learn a lesson . . . no place for you here, this is Wall Street, a gigantic exchange of energies. [*In each of five offices bells ring. Simultaneously, five men pull telephones toward them on adjustable arms.*]

FIVE MEN

Hello— Yes— Good-bye. [*Telephones spring back.*]

RUMSEY

[*Going on calmly.*] Takes moral fibre this game . . . self-control, that's the secret! [ROGER *laughs nervously.*] You laugh . . . bad habit . . . nerves . . . no moral character—get the money-making manner, brief, persuasive.

LOUISE

But please——

RUMSEY

That's all. Don't thank me, we do business here courteously, but always business. Don't thank me, good day. [*by this time there is an enormous pile of papers on each of the five desks in the little offices. The five men start going over the papers feverishly with staccato gestures.* ROGER *and* LOUISE *back away from* RUMSEY, *crushed.* RUMSEY *turns to the dictaphone.*] Seventeen billion, six hundred million, eight hundred and forty-two thousand. . . .

Curtain closes.

Before Outer Curtain. Twilight.

ROGER *very tired and more ragged, in front of curtain.*

A ragged man enters left, collarless, a torn hat, a professional slouch.

RAGGED MAN

[*After considering* ROGER.] Aw, give us a dime for a sandwich, can't yer?

ROGER

No, I can't, I only have a little money.

RAGGED MAN

Give us wot you got.

ROGER

No, I need it.

RAGGED MAN

All right, I ain't had no food today.

ROGER

Neither have I. [RAGGED MAN *without surprise, produces cigarette butt, then he searches his pockets for a lonely match and lights the butt.*]

RAGGED MAN

To hell with New York! [*Querulously.*] I say, to hell with New York! No women in New York,

all the dames is too thin, bones, nuthin' to hold onto. Where the hell is all the fat wimmin, huh? This city is on the bum.

ROGER

Yes, maybe it is.

RAGGED MAN

It's mostways guys like you an' me, lazy guys, watch the procession, pick up cigarette butts——

ROGER

I don't do that.

RAGGED MAN

[*Scanning him carefully.*] Wait, you will! Ain't we the riff-raff, dead ones . . . die on the asphalt like you see an old horse die! Wot street do we take? Who cares? Ain't it a scream? I could croak o' laughin', I could! An' it's move on . . . move on . . . you get pulled if you don't move fast.

ROGER

I know it.

RAGGED MAN

[*Growling bitterly.*] Move on! Say how'd you like t'hop a freight for the Middle West?

ROGER

No, I just came from there.

RAGGED MAN

That's different! Don't matter: I been everywhere.

ROGER

Have you?

RAGGED MAN

Everywhere—East, West, every place is on the bum!

ROGER

Is this all of life, the sum of it?

RAGGED MAN

Wot's the use o' life when Death's awaitin' for you? Death's better: the river's there waitin' . . . that's movin' on!

ROGER

Not by drowning, I couldn't drown.

RAGGED MAN

There's other ways, Death's waitin'! [*Looking at* ROGER *closely.*] That's all right, you're a good kid, wait'll you know wot I know.

ROGER

What do you know?

RAGGED MAN

All wot these here streets can tell! [*Scratching himself, speaks with slow wisdom.*] Women, Death an' garbage . . . things that walk the streets. [*He puffs on the dying cigarette butt, then he spies another butt on the ground, picks it up, arranges it with some care and lights it from the first one.*] That's all right, pal, any time you might want me, I generally hang around this street when night comes on . . . when it goes kind o' gray here I be. . . . [*Enter a street walker, very thin, queer bedraggled hat perched on bright peroxide hair, big feverish eyes in an old face, carrying a little black bag. She comes center and stands there looking back as if afraid of something.*]

STREET WALKER

[*In a moaning singsong voice.*] Them cops gimme a scare . . . they follow you, an' you run like a rat, you run like the ghost of a rat . . .

RAGGED MAN

[*Bored.*] Bones, too thin, nuthin' but bones. [*He slouches off. The* STREET WALKER *approaches* ROGER *pathetically.*]

STREET WALKER

I walk in daylight to make it easier . . . but it ain't no different, day an' night, day an' night . . . huh! Love walks day an' night! [*In a low voice, a weird crooning singsong, like a mother singing to her child.*] Come on, lonely kid, wanna have a good time? I make you warm, I sweet-mamma you, I show you the gate of Paradise, say come in, some in, sweet papa! the face ain't so much, but it's the shape, the thin shape in a silk shimmy, silk like you see in the magazines, sweet mamma smell good in silk shimmy, lonely kid . . .

ROGER

[*Takes her by both arms, staring at her brutally.*] Are you a bad dream walking the street, are you white magic?

STREET WALKER

[*Laughing raucously.*] No, I'm sour Sadie . . . come quick. . . . [*Looking up in his face and beckoning.*] You got a wad, you got mazuma for love bird . . .

ROGER

What?

STREET WALKER

Money, money . . .

ROGER

I have less than a dollar.

STREET WALKER

[*Violently angry.*] Leggo me, leggo——

ROGER

[*Persistently.*] Are you the secret, the key?

STREET WALKER

Not to tramps. [*Screaming.*] Leggo. . . . Police, police, here's a guy without money, chase him, run him in! [*Wild and shrill.*] Police! [ROGER *has backed away against proscenium, left. A man enters right, hands in pockets, hat pulled over eyes. The* STREET WALKER *approaches him exactly as she had approached* ROGER.] Come on, lonely kid, wanna have a good time? I make you warm, I sweet-mamma you, I show you the gate to Paradise. [*The* MAN *turns away from her and exits. She follows, crooning the same words mechanically.*]

ROGER

[*Alone, trembling with anger and bitterness.*] The air is full of gasoline and perfume and the smell of it is poison! I sweat with fear hurrying in tall streets

among gray windows. [*Shaking his fist up at the towering curtain.*] What do the windows hide, what people laughing among treasures? To be home, just to be home! Oh, City, oh, City of stone and steel. . . . I belong to you now! Beaten and afraid I take my way hungrily among the living dead. . . . Give me bread, only bread! What are dreams? I came looking for golden women, I came from wide prairies. . . . Why does your stone splendor touch the sky? Oh, City, do you mock the stars with your brightness? . . . In the gray pit of the streets pass the gray millions—and all these that pass are hungry . . . starving men and women, hungry . . . like me! like me! What doom will come on this place, what doom, oh, hungry City? Your thrones will fall and your buildings will crash together, Singer and Woolworth will go to dust. . . . Death will come in a whirlwind breaking your sky towers—and the hungry will shout for joy! Are these dead, these that pass with white faces? Will these men rise from their graves in the streets and subways, will they rise laughing to destroy the city of their shame? . . . I am yours, oh, City of slaves. . . . I am one of the millions, servants of death and time, hungry, moaning for bread! [*He falls on his knees.*] I pray before you, New York. . . . I, Roger Bloomer, pray and curse you, oh, City, mother of my fear . . . like my own mother, my flesh mother, to whom I curse

and pray. . . . [*He lies on ground at foot of the curtain in the dusk.*]

The Curtain opens center on a neat drug-store counter.

[*Bottles and toilet articles in the brightly illuminated glass case. Behind, cases of drugs. A brisk clerk in white coat, hair slick.*]

ROGER *comes to the counter timidly, perspiring with determination.*

ROGER

I want . . . [*he gulps and goes on*] I want some bichloride of mercury! *The* CLERK *leans far over counter looking intently at* ROGER.]

CLERK

[*In a dry nasal voice.*] That's poison! That's Death! Make your application at the Morgue, we don't sell Death here! [*He leans back and chuckles dryly, turning away from* ROGER.] We don't sell Death here!

ROGER

But I want it to kill rats.

CLERK

[*Carelessly.*] Y'want rat poison?

ROGER

Yes, I want rat poison. [CLERK *produces a bottle and sets it on counter.*] How much is it?

CLERK

Fifty cents. Pay the cashier. [ROGER *searches pockets for fifty-cent piece and goes, clutching coin in one hand and bottle in the other. Another clerk in white, exactly like the first, joins his companion behind the counter.* FIRST CLERK *points after* ROGER, *with shrill laugh.*] Funny! They come in here lookin' for Death.

THE OTHER CLERK

Will he drink it?

THE FIRST CLERK

Sure, couldn't do him no harm, mebbe give 'im a gut-ache. . . . Serve 'im right for goin' wild!

THE OTHER CLERK

What makes 'em like that? [*Both clerks laugh.*]

MR. *and* MRS. BLOOMER *are at dinner under the red and green electric lamp.*

They are eating the roast, ROGER'S *empty chair between them. The phlegmatic sadness of middle age is heavy on the two.*

BLOOMER

Will you ring the bell? [MRS. BLOOMER *rings bell and* MAID *comes.*] Some more potatoes, Mary. [MAID *passes potatoes. She goes. Time elapses. They have no gusto for the food. Both stare at one another and at the ceiling. Then together they each take a mouthful and return to their awkward, tragic contemplation.*] The new store of mine in Butte is making money . . . and when I say money, I mean money! [*Pause.*] What's the dessert tonight?

MRS. BLOOMER

Well, I thought you'd like rice pudding tonight.

BLOOMER

Sure, why not? [*He takes another mouthful. He pushes his plate away, his voice completely breaking.*] That boy may be coming to harm! [MRS. BLOOMER *looks pleadingly. She blows her nose. At the same time she wipes away a tear with the corner of her handkerchief. She settles herself, they eat doggedly.*] I've done everything I could, telegraphed to those lawyers in New York, telegraphed to Poppin's boy to find him . . . what else?

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Suddenly her high choked voice breaks out of her as if released by a spring.*] I want to cry and

I can't! [Bloomer *grunts.*] I can't go on like this, week in, week out . . . everything goes to pieces, what's the world coming to, what are people doing?

Bloomer

Same old things.

Mrs. Bloomer

No, new things, bad things! I've gone to church, I've been a church woman . . . and now, nothing to hold onto.

Bloomer

Hold onto me, ma.

Mrs. Bloomer

You! I don't know you . . . My son! My son! [*They continue to sit stiffly at the table in the attitudes of mummies. Silence while* Maid *changes the dishes and goes.*]

Mr. Bloomer

What things are in women's heads?

Mrs. Bloomer

I feel like those horrid animals you see hung up in the butcher shops, inside out . . . bleeding . . .

BLOOMER

[*Muttering.*] Just when I'm getting rich . . . rich . . .

MRS. BLOOMER

Everything goes to pieces, the world ends in a doom . . . and my son alone . . . dying . . . ?

BLOOMER

[*Rises.*] I'm going to New York. [*He exits.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Calling after him in squeaky voice.*] Be sure you take your rubbers! [*Her hands go out in a wide flutter.*] He doesn't listen, no one listens. . . . I feel a doom all over the world, people breaking things, breaking carelessly. . . . [*Clutching at tablecloth she pulls it wildly, the dishes clattering broken to the floor.*] I, too . . . breaking up! It's so careless . . . churches falling down! [*Her hands go up in the air and she collapses over the table.*]

Before the Outer Curtain. Dim evening light.

ROGER *crosses to right. Looks at the bottle in his hand curiously.*

ROGER

[*Reading label.*] "Best for pests, they don't die in the house, an end to rats and all similar vermin!"

[*He uncorks the bottle.*] That's for me: similar vermin! [*He swallows the whole contents. He stands waiting for something to happen, then he doubles up with a violent cramp, holding stomach with both hands. He sits on steps right. Enter the* RAGGED MAN *left, slouching as usual.*]

RAGGED MAN

So you come to meet me when the dark comes on—I was waitin'.

ROGER

Where's Death? Is Death waiting?

RAGGED MAN

Say, pal, gotta drink, got joy in a bottle. [*He seizes the rat poison bottle.*]

ROGER

It's finished.

RAGGED MAN

[*Scratching head.*] Now that's one I never tried.

ROGER

Can a man die like a rat if he wants to?

RAGGED MAN

[*Frightened.*] No, get up quick, pal . . . a cop'll come by, run us both in an' where'll I be!

[*Whining.*] If I leave you here, you'll go blooie, some one might blame me! [ROGER *gets uncertainly to his feet.*]

ROGER

I saw the City in a dream, women and death and garbage . . . I wanted to die!

RAGGED MAN

This is no place to croak. You don't know nuthin', there's a way for all them things. I know a way to get wimmin widout payin' nuthin', I know a way to croak so easy, shake hands with Death! [*He approaches* ROGER *menacingly.*] How'dy, Mr. Death.

ROGER

[*Backing away from him, frightened.*] No, no . . .

RAGGED MAN

You dunno what you want, you dunno nuthin'! Hell, wot a soft guy! You're all right, lean on me, walk natural. . . . [RAGGED MAN *and* ROGER *walk across stage.* ROGER, *helpless, dangles along in firm grip of the other.*] Let your legs loose, I'll keep 'em straight, dead or alive, walk like a man, head up! Just to kid the cops, just to keep the law. . . . [*They go out.*]

LOUISE'S *flat.*

The lights lighted. MISS BURNS *stands listening intently.*

MISS BURNS

At last . . . is it you, dear? [LOUISE *enters tiredly.*]

LOUISE

Who'd you think it was, a ghost?

MISS BURNS

This must stop: you're very late again, been mooning about, I suppose. Oh, I'm old and I understand— [*Hastily.*] You think I don't, but I do . . . people must live in an orderly way, must be respectable!

LOUISE

What for? For what end?

MISS BURNS

I guess God sees the end. [*Doorbell rings.*]

LOUISE

What can that be? It might be . . . [*She hurries off.* MISS BURNS *shrugs.* LOUISE *returns followed by* RAGGED MAN *with* ROGER, ROGER *hanging limp as before.*]

RAGGED MAN

[*Philosophically.*] He don't know much, he walks like in a fog.

LOUISE

But he asked to be brought here.

RAGGED MAN

Not him—I found your address in his pocket!

MISS BURNS

[*In firm quavering voice.*] What is the meaning of this? [RAGGED MAN *produces the rat poison bottle.* MISS BURNS *snatches it hastily.*] But he couldn't have taken it, it smells so badly.

RAGGED MAN

The world's a heap o' garbage an' it smells lousy—wha'd'yer know, little dame?

MISS BURNS

[*Her voice rising.*] This is most disorderly.

RAGGED MAN

Do I smell so bad? [LOUISE *pushes* MISS BURNS *angrily aside.*]

LOUISE

Oh, stop talking: this is my job. [*To* RAGGED MAN.] We'll fix him as comfortable as we can on the couch.

MISS BURNS

But it's not decent, we can't keep him here, two lone women in a flat . . .

RAGGED MAN

Anyway, you're safe, with that face!

LOUISE

[*Bending tenderly over* ROGER.] If he'd come to me this wouldn't have happened. [ROGER *sits on the couch, dazed, gathering his strength.*]

RAGGED MAN

[*Laughing.*] Huh! Let it learn 'im, he didn't know so much.

MISS BURNS

Have you anything else to say?

RAGGED MAN

[*Quietly to* LOUISE.] I better slip out: the old 'un, she don't like the smell.

LOUISE

Go on then.

RAGGED MAN

I brung 'im to yer, that's worth somethin'!

LOUISE

What do you want?

RAGGED MAN

Dollar!

LOUISE

Here's fifty cents.

RAGGED MAN

[*Takes it shrugging.*] Is that wot this bird's life is worth, huh? [*He exits.*]

LOUISE

[*To* MISS BURNS.] See that he goes.

MISS BURNS

Mercy on us! I'll send for a doctor! [*Exit* MISS BURNS.]

LOUISE

[*Softly.*] Roger . . . Roger Bloomer, do you hear me? I'm by your side. I was waiting for you.

[*Looking out at the night sky.*] There's a buzzin' out there . . . the lights shake and the whole town's laughing! Laugh, New York, laugh, stone city, him and me will beat you yet, wait, we'll lick you, New York, him and me. . . . [*Suddenly tender.*] How do you feel, tired kid?

ROGER

[*Slowly recollecting himself.*] Seems like some terrible joke was played on me.

LOUISE

On both of us!

ROGER

I thought I was so brave, and I was just sick at my stomach!

LOUISE

You'll be brave some other time.

ROGER

I heard you say you were waiting for me, we'll beat New York, you said! [LOUISE, ***head bent, silent.***] Well, did I dream it? [*She shakes her head. He goes on, his voice strained and hoarse.*] I don't know how to thank you, don't deserve it frankly, I'm not much of a man.

LOUISE

[*Huddled closer in herself.*] Don't——

ROGER

You must give me a chance to make the dream real—that's what's hard, making dreams come real.

LOUISE

If you'd only come to me, Roger.

ROGER

This is what I came for, but I didn't know! I was looking for some mystery. [*She smiles.*] How did I know it was so simple? [*They look at each other.* LOUISE *shakes off the spell.*] I'll go out and get a job tomorrow, find some sort of work.

LOUISE

You're not well enough yet.

ROGER

No more nonsense; I'll find something, then I'll come to you, tell you all about it.

LOUISE

I think of you like a knight, Roger, in a battle.

ROGER

Better wait, the battle's just beginning!

CURTAIN

ACT III
NEW YORK

ACT III

In front of a curtain, six large brown leather arm-chairs. The two center ones are empty. In the other four, two on either side, sit four elderly gentlemen reading conservative newspapers and smoking cigars.

Enter left, EUGENE POPPIN *with* ROGER. ROGER *is dressed neatly, stiff new clothes which fit badly.* EUGENE *as a New York young man, is more dignified and sophisticated than out in Excelsior.*

EUGENE

[*As they walk slowly in front of row of chairs, speaks with quiet dignity in a low voice.*] This is one of the best clubs, I'm lucky to have the entrée here.

ROGER

[*Imitating* EUGENE'S *hushed manner.*] Everybody seems very old.

EUGENE

[*Stops and whispers significantly.*] Millionaires! [*They continue their walk.*] And we move among

them like one friend with another, that's this great Democracy for you . . . no classes! [*They turn at right.*] Let's just move, quietly, to these chairs here. [*They sit down,* ROGER *very uncertainly as if he feared there were pins in the chair. The* OLD GENTLEMEN *pay no attention.*]

ROGER

I must thank you again for lending me that money, I didn't have a cent.

EUGENE

[*Nervously.*] Hush, don't speak of it here . . . but between ourselves, you looked bad when I found you: here's the telegram I received from your father. [*He hands the yellow sheet to* ROGER.]

ROGER

[*Reads.*] "Find Roger Bloomer, put him on right track." [ROGER *looks up.*] But what is the right track? [EUGENE *lights a cigarette and his manner reminds one of Iowa.*]

EUGENE

Look at me!

ROGER

I'd hardly know you, you've changed a lot.

EUGENE

It's New York, the downtown manner.

ROGER

Me, too, I've come a long way from Iowa.

EUGENE

Why don't you go back? I've already telegraphed your family.

ROGER

Can't go backward, I must go on, find myself——

EUGENE

Hush, this is a very good club.

ROGER

Every man, in torture even, got to find his own soul——

EUGENE

[*Suavely.*] Oh, as to that, I know about that . . . *Life,* you see! Life is a treadmill . . . week follows week, today treads on the heels of tomorrow, your brain goes tick-tack, your heart goes quack-quack, and your blood curdles like milk! The trick is to dress well and laugh.

ROGER

[*Astonished.*] But . . . but you never used to talk like that.

EUGENE

I'm in with a very literary crowd. . . . I understand you perfectly, got ideas myself—but I know what things are worth, learned a gentle cynicism: there are no red moments in life.

ROGER

There are for me.

EUGENE

Who's the girl?

ROGER

How did you know?

EUGENE

I might have known that wild talk would end in the first shop girl you met—and they call that idealism!

ROGER

She's not a shop girl . . . well, not exactly.

EUGENE

Isn't it a rotten joke, the devil's own joke? [OLD GENTLEMAN *at left, who has white side whiskers,*

rises and goes to OLD MAN *second from left, showing him something in newspaper.*]

FIRST OLD GENTLEMAN

Did you see this?

SECOND OLD GENTLEMAN

[*Sleepily.*] Disgraceful!

FIRST OLD GENTLEMAN

Where do these things happen?

SECOND OLD GENTLEMAN

[*Tapping newspaper.*] Saloons, brothels, gambling dens, tenements, crimes of passion . . .

FIRST OLD GENTLEMAN

[*Sitting down again.*] Must be stopped, must be stopped!

EUGENE

How will you get money? Thought of that? [ROGER *nods.*] What you need is a technical education.

ROGER

I'll manage somehow!

EUGENE

[*Amused.*] Love will find a way. [*He rises.*] Better let me see this young woman.

ROGER

Come, if you like. [*Facing him.*] But don't interfere. . . . [*He doubles his fists.*] Or I'll show you, I have a will of my own, not a child as I was back home.

EUGENE

[*Suavely, as they move across to left.*] Ah, but think of your father and mother eating their hearts out, way back in Iowa!

ROGER

Can't I get away from my ancestors, be myself!

EUGENE

No, you can't, only think. . . . [*They exit left,* EUGENE *still talking.*]

OLD GENTLEMAN

[*At left, turning to one next him, tapping newspaper.*] Did you see this . . . ? [*The other* OLD GENTLEMAN *snores. The snore is repeated musically from the two old men at right. The* OLD GEN-

TLEMAN *at left grunts, puts newspaper over eyes, and snores louder than the rest.*]

LOUISE'S *flat.*

MISS BURNS *and* LOUISE *sit in silence.* MISS BURNS *in the rocker swaying gently.*

LOUISE

I wish he'd come.

MISS BURNS

Maybe he won't!

LOUISE

Why are you so mean about it?

MISS BURNS

In my day, young people had delicate feelings. Now if a young man had loved me——

LOUISE

Fat chance you would of had of a man.

MISS BURNS

I was very handsome in the old-fashioned way!

LOUISE

[*Flaring up.*] What do I care for you—we're young, we got our own ways! Don't simper at me, I'm sick of it!

MISS BURNS

Hate never built a house yet!

LOUISE

Don't talk to me any more, or I'll . . . I'll . . . [ROGER *appears, facing her in her rising passion.*]

ROGER

The door was open, I just walked in. [LOUISE *looks at him sullenly.* MISS BURNS *chirps pleasantly.*]

MISS BURNS

I'll leave you two young creatures alone. [*She exits.*]

ROGER

What were you so angry about?

LOUISE

Don't you know I'm always angry? Did you get a job?

ROGER

No, but I lunched with a lot of millionaires!

LOUISE

My God!

ROGER

A friend of mine is coming here tonight.

LOUISE

But Roger, I'm not dressed.

ROGER

Never mind . . . anything new at the office?

LOUISE

The Boss looked at me sort of soft today.

ROGER

Elliott T. Rumsey!

LOUISE

If he should slip me a bid to dinner, him with his morals, that would be funny!

ROGER

Funny things happen.

LOUISE

And what I'd answer would be funnier yet.

ROGER

You wouldn't go?

LOUISE

I dunno. . . . I might, Roger!

ROGER

Louise, don't look like you were going to cry! Long enough the bride of misery, you're mine now —I'll love you, I'll take care of you.

LOUISE

[*Sniffling, dabbing at her eyes uneasily with her handkerchief.*] Don't, Roger, I can't stand no more! [*He kisses her gently.*] Don't . . . it kinder hurts!

ROGER

It's meant to hurt, that shows it's the real thing.

LOUISE

[*Simply.*] Where's the money coming from?

ROGER

I must think . . . you see, there's not much opening for a man without a technical education, that 's the key!

LOUISE

Won't your friend help you out?

ROGER

No, he's trying to send me back to Iowa.

LOUISE

Don't leave me, Roger.

ROGER

Maybe I could get money from my father, for a technical education, but I hate to ask him for that. I must think about myself, plan . . .

LOUISE

But me, what about me?

ROGER

Oh . . . er . . . wait, wait a few years.

LOUISE

I can't stand it a day longer!

ROGER

But money——

LOUISE

It makes me afraid to think.

ROGER

Me too, I'm afraid to think.

LOUISE

There's only one thing that beats out fear, money makes you safe— [*Softly as if she were singing a lullaby.*] Money makes your heart warm and kind . . . money . . .

ROGER

This is the Spring song of tired youth.

LOUISE

If you have money, you eat, you sleep, the others work on the cold winter mornings!

ROGER

I've had so many dreams.

LOUISE

That's a dream all gold! then you lie in the soft places, and dreams come to your tired mind softly without effort . .

ROGER

To laugh at the world, to throw dollars in everyone's face—to give, to give——

LOUISE

Oh, no, don't give it: save it, pile it in big neat piles—aren't the buildings high, in those buildings

money lives! But how to get it . . . ah . . . [*The bell has rung.* MISS BURNS *ushers in* EUGENE POPPIN.]

MISS BURNS

Come right in, so glad to have you.

EUGENE

Good evening, Roger.

ROGER

My friend, Miss Chamberlain, Mr. Poppin.

EUGENE

Charmed.

LOUISE

I didn't expect you or I would of dressed.

MISS BURNS

I'll make a wee bit of coffee. [*She exits busily.*]

EUGENE

[*Sitting down easily.*] Quite all right. I like the home atmosphere, just for a quiet talk.

ROGER

I guess you'll do most of the talking.

EUGENE

[*Offering cigarette to* LOUISE.] You smoke?

LOUISE

No.

EUGENE

[*Lighting one.*] May I? [*She nods.*] Do you read the latest books?

LOUISE

No.

EUGENE

You go to the theater?

LOUISE

No.

EUGENE

I seldom miss anything good! I try to keep in the inner circle of all the latest movements.

LOUISE

You must have a swell time.

EUGENE

I do as I please, that's my secret.

LOUISE

You must have lots of money then.

EUGENE

[*Considering her thoughtfully.*] Ah, money! I live modestly, but I think it pays to have the best of everything. Now, Miss Chamberlain, tell me all about yourself.

LOUISE

Myself, I'm nothing much.

ROGER

[*Rising.*] Louise, you're tired, better not talk any more tonight.

LOUISE

Let him go on, Roger, I like to hear him.

EUGENE

Psychology, Suppression, Inhibitions, Complexes—[*He hesitates, unable to think of any more words.*] Ah, well, what difference does it all make?

LOUISE

[*Smiling at* ROGER.] He's right, Roger, nothing makes any difference: you take things so seriously.

EUGENE

Just what I tell him.

LOUISE

What does it matter if the world ends tomorrow, none of us much good!

ROGER

Then why do we all sit here?

EUGENE

Talk! That keeps you from doing things you might be sorry for. Exchange ideas! Now I think. . . . [*He is still talking easily as the lights fade.*]

Before the Outer Curtain. Light of fading afternoon.

ROGER *waiting. He looks at his watch. Enter* LOUISE, *greatly excited.*

ROGER

You left the office late, I've been waiting for you a long time.

LOUISE

Yes, I've done it . . . done it——

ROGER

What have you done?

LOUISE

What's the use, you wouldn't understand, you play at love, but you're against me, like the others!

ROGER

Have we two got secrets already?

LOUISE

[*Looking up into his face pathetically.*] Then be gentle, Roger, look at me kindly, you're looking at a thief . . . today at the office, I stole three thousand dollars in bonds. . . . Oh, this was easy, nothing brave about it! Blind chance took me, I went all hot, I was carrying the bonds through the hall, I just took three and put them in my dress. They're as good as cash, three thousand dollars here, next my heart!

ROGER

It's not you talking, it's a strange voice talking nonsense——

LOUISE

I've trusted you, now you must swear secrecy.

ROGER

Of course——

LOUISE

Swear by what you love!

ROGER

[*Turning from her bitterly.*] I don't love anything now.

LOUISE

So that's how you take it? It's you that made me do it, turned me off my balance when I was going so nicely—all of a sudden this blind hatred took me.

ROGER

[*Holding her arm in a violent grip turns her round to face him.*] Louise, this is a bad dream . . . answer me!

LOUISE

You must swear secrecy——

ROGER

I swear.

LOUISE

Swear by what you hate!

ROGER

I swear by New York, our granite mother——

LOUISE

[*Opening her little bag.*] Maybe this'll show you, look with your eyes, touch 'em!

ROGER

[*Straining to see the papers in the dim light.*] One thousand . . . two thousand . . . three thousand dollars.

LOUISE

You gave me a gold nightmare! Wait years, you said, with that old woman heckling me; technical school, you said——

ROGER

You think I'd go on this money?

LOUISE

No, but I thought you'd understand: I came to you, didn't I, like a child to its mother, saying, Roger . . . [*Pause. She goes on brokenly.*] Roger, I'm so scared and nervous . . . something bigger'n me is happening to me.

ROGER

I didn't understand it like that.

LOUISE

You ought to, you the rebel, against the fat-heads and the old lying people, you that hate fakes——

ROGER

This is no fake, it's life and death——

LOUISE

I'm ready! have a good laugh before I die.

ROGER

[*Holding her arms in an iron grip.*] And love, Louise?

LOUISE

[*Laughing bitterly.*] Maybe it's another fake.

ROGER

You and I must get at each other, understand, somehow . . . all your life has been sort of a fight, hasn't it, struggle against odds . . . poverty . . . ?

LOUISE

What makes it worth while? What fruit does it bring? Money, that's all! [*She presses her little bag against her bosom.*] Did you ever think how it feels money, did you ever think what it buys? . . . Me, I've done that!

ROGER

So have I!

LOUISE

Silk, satin, sweet perfume crushed out of swell flowers, soft running whispering motors . . .

ROGER

This is a gold nightmare—and Money on a throne. . . . Money, the dirty god, the obscene god, what a dream! What's the end of it!

LOUISE

Oh, I guess the end's near, but I'm not afraid, because I know the meanness of things right to the bottom.

ROGER

Maybe the real gods are coming, there's a whisper of doom in the sky and the big black houses are dancing—don't do it, Louise!

LOUISE

It's better than selling my body to a rich man, and anyway no one wants me. [*She wants desperately to make* ROGER *understand.*] Girls sell their bodies, near all of 'em, one way or another—but with me, I've kept my body clean, that's something isn't it?

ROGER

One more question—do you love me? [*She looks at him fixedly, smiles.*]

LOUISE

Not even sure about that! [*He turns from her. She follows him.*] You're so young and wild, how can you understand the dead Hell where I walk?

ROGER

Maybe I've walked there, too.

LOUISE

No, your head's in the sky listening for the tread of gods' feet on clouds—come down to earth!

ROGER

It's you that won't see clearly, won't even admit we love each other—that's a nice joke, you try to make yourself bitter against me, try to hate me—but you can't! I tell you, inside you there's the living Springtime: you're just afraid that's all, afraid of yourself, worse afraid of me!

LOUISE

[*Hands raised against him.*] No, no, don't talk to me like that!

ROGER

You pretend your heart's dead, but it's living still!

LOUISE

How long still, how long!

ROGER

The dead heart is beating fast! I'm your man——

LOUISE

What do you want of me, Roger?

ROGER

I need you! What am I without you? You've got to make good.

LOUISE

[*Quietly, bowing her head.*] What you say I'll do, because I must.

ROGER

Give me the bonds, I'll take them back for you.

LOUISE

No, no, that's impossible, you couldn't get in.

ROGER

Perhaps not, I must think——

LOUISE

I'll take them back, it's my job, I must see it to the end.

ROGER

Then go back to the office, perfectly safe, it's not late, you can still get in, nobody will be there, it will be dark, leave these on a desk in the outer office, in a drawer where they will be found.

LOUISE

I'll try.

ROGER

Then you must go alone, perfectly safe, if anyone sees you, act natural, say you came back for something, don't be frightened, dry your eyes.

LOUISE

You're so strong, Roger.

ROGER

I'll wait here, if you don't come back in ten minutes, I'll come for you. [*She still hesitates.*] Now go.

LOUISE

I must do what you say. [*She goes listlessly.*].

The offices of ELLIOTT T. RUMSEY *cover the greater part of stage as before.*

But it is now pitch dark, except in RUMSEY'S *inner sanctum, where he sits at his desk, on it a red droplight.* RUMSEY *is tired out, erect after a hard business day, going over papers wearily. On the desk as usual, a glass water pitcher and two glasses.*

RUMSEY

[*Looking at his watch, mumbles.*] Late . . . late. . . . [LOUISE *lights electric light in office at extreme right. Scared and nervous, she takes bonds from her little bag.* RUMSEY *listens, rises, and goes to door of his office. He passes through slowly to next office.* LOUISE *listens, hears* RUMSEY *coming. She hesitates, puts the papers back in her bag, then turns out light.* RUMSEY *comes through lighting electricity as he comes. Pressing button in office at extreme right, he reveals* LOUISE *standing with her back to door panting.*]

RUMSEY

[*Without surprise.*] Ah, it's you, Miss Chamberlain.

LOUISE

I came back for my purse which I left here. [*She holds up her bag.*]

RUMSEY

Of course, I don't question your movements . . . on the other hand, I am pleased; I want to talk to you . . . don't be alarmed, personally: will you come into my office? [*He opens the door for her.*]

LOUISE

[*Looking at her bag, hesitating.*]. But I . . . that is . . .

RUMSEY

What is it?

LOUISE

[*Clutching the bag with a smile.*] Nothing at all. [*She goes through draggingly. In silence they cross to his office. He sits down, folding his hands on desk. She stands by it respectfully.*]

RUMSEY

This chance meeting pleases me, this is calm, without the tension of the business day.

LOUISE

Yes, sir. [*He looks up. Something in his face surprises her.*] Is there anything wrong?

RUMSEY

No, indeed . . . I want you to sit down. [*She is surprised.*] Don't make me repeat it. [*She sits.*] Now we can talk on a more equal basis: I've been thinking this over, today I reached a decision, a change of great importance, making you a proposition of a sort that might surprise you: Miss Chamberlain, how would you like to marry me?

LOUISE

[*Exclaiming.*] God!

RUMSEY

[*Continuing in his even passionless voice.*] Oh, I know it's unusual, these things happen: you're an intelligent and able girl, surely there are no classes in this great Democracy! I've watched you improve and develop, something's been changing in you——

LOUISE

It has, it has . . .

RUMSEY

I've selected you, I think, with rare judgment. [*He smiles and rubs his hands.*]

LOUISE

[*With a little choking laugh.*] Aw, you're joking.

RUMSEY

Does it strike you as a humorous subject?

LOUISE

Then you ask me?

RUMSEY

I am rich in the common acceptance of the term, not young, but I've lived a temperate life, self-control, I've lived straight from A to Z: I take it then to be settled?

LOUISE

No, no, I can't do it. . . . Honest, I appreciate it.

RUMSEY

I can see it upsets you.

LOUISE

Let me go, don't talk to me tonight.

RUMSEY

This is calm here, without the buzz of typewriters, time to talk. [*Rising, he walks about her chair, for the first time showing some feeling.*] It means a lot to me this, means a lot, must have an answer, must discuss it!

LOUISE

All right, I wouldn't marry you for a million dollars. [*Pause,* RUMSEY *considers.*]

RUMSEY

How about a million and a half? When it comes to money . . .

LOUISE

Oh, money . . . !

RUMSEY

I can offer you money to a degree beyond the common dream! Have you thought of that, dreamed of money? [LOUISE *nods.*] You'd be a lady, that is you're a lady now, but dresses, you know, dresses!

LOUISE

[*In scarcely audible voice.*] Silks, sweet perfumes, soft running motors . . .

RUMSEY

Yes, a motor, that helps . . . you could get up late, have people to tea, go to lectures.

LOUISE

[*Hiding her insane amusement.*] Sounds good, it does!

RUMSEY

This I offer you: money doesn't come easy to those that go after it with their brains. Maybe I didn't work myself gray, maybe I didn't go home tired at night, aching!

LOUISE

You, too?

RUMSEY

Holding on tight, fighting for another inch, another golden inch!

LOUISE

Then why hand the spoils to me?

RUMSEY

With me the time is ripe, for a woman trustworthy, attractive to me in the highest degree——

LOUISE

You think I'm that?

RUMSEY

Your body, if I may so express myself, has produced a sensation in me natural, but beyond expectation.

LOUISE

Oh, my body?

RUMSEY

It's natural to share one's fortune in a union both spiritual and satisfactory: after the hard fight the reward—for us both! I've lived a very severe life, self-control.

LOUISE

To think, if you'd asked me to supper and a show I might have fallen for it . . . but this, the whole future laid out like a map!

RUMSEY

Marriage is the biggest offer a man can make.

LOUISE

It's not enough.

RUMSEY

I think you want the stars and the sun.

LOUISE

And if I do?

RUMSEY

And what about my wants? Do you think they're less violent or less desperate? [*She turns away. His voice changes to pleading.*] Listen, at least listen! You're youth, and all the rest, money, this office, is nothing but a bad dream—you're everything to me right now, everything . . .

LOUISE

Me that's nothing!

RUMSEY

I want you.

LOUISE

We can't have everything we want. [*She laughs.*]

RUMSEY

There was a woman that laughed once too often. [*She laughs helplessly like a very small child. He is close to her, he takes hold of her shoulders violently.*] Am I funny to you now?

LOUISE

Oh funny . . . funny.

RUMSEY

Human I am, you understand—no, you don't know that, you'll never know, nobody will ever know!

LOUISE

Let me go. [*He releases her.*] Self-control, Mister——

RUMSEY

[*Violently.*] You think I'll hurt you: why should I hurt you? You're not here, are you? Your heart's

not here! But there's something to say from me to your heart: passion exists, when everything turns black and reality dies . . . Elliott T. Rumsey says, passion exists! [*He throws her violently away from him. She stumbles to the ground. He sweeps up all the papers on desk and throws them about him with wide gesture of contempt. He pours water from glass pitcher over papers, as if he were watering flowers. He throws the pitcher, tray and glasses to the ground with great crash. Then he sinks into chair.*]

LOUISE

Mr. Rumsey, what is it?

RUMSEY

[*With an effort.*] Just leave, will you, and never come back.

LOUISE

You feel better now?

RUMSEY

I'm all right, subject to attacks, I'll see my doctor. I beg you to walk out quietly. Keep it quiet, always keep things quiet! That will be all, never come back. [LOUISE *hastens through offices toward right.* RUMSEY *twitches aimlessly in his chair.*]

—Before the Outer Curtain.

ROGER *is waiting for* LOUISE. *She comes, breathless.*

ROGER

Did you leave them?

LOUISE

No, no, I couldn't, the Boss was there.

ROGER

Well, what happened?

LOUISE

I feel like laughing, Roger, everything happens so queerly——

ROGER

But the bonds.

LOUISE

I have them still, I got scared and ran away.

ROGER

Give them to me, it's not safe to carry them a minute, I'll tear them up.

LOUISE

No, no.

ROGER

Safer. [*He takes the bonds from her, and tears them into bits.*]

LOUISE

I'll do something like this again, steal again, feelings take me so queerly.

ROGER

Trust me!

LOUISE

Supposing I should die or something.

ROGER

Don't talk like that.

LOUISE

People that aren't strong enough to live ought to die, that's what I'll do, you wait!

ROGER

You and I are stronger than this whole town——

LOUISE

All the shadows are laughing at us, I guess the town's full of people like us, wanting something they can't have. One's feelings are like a ripple in

a pond, it spreads and spreads, the feeling of all the world, the heart's wish gets this awful sweep till it gilds the skies, the little ripples spreading till they wrinkle the far skies!

ROGER

Louise, come home, come home. [*They exit.*]

LOUISE'S *flat.*

[LOUISE *alone.* *Enter* EUGENE.]

EUGENE

Ah, good evening . . . [*Pause.*] Have you seen Roger today?

LOUISE

I think he'll be here soon.

EUGENE

Fond of him?

LOUISE

[*With elaborate carelessness.*] Oh of course.

EUGENE

Then why don't you leave him alone?

LOUISE

Because he needs me.

EUGENE

Nonsense, he needs to get on his own feet and you know it . . . hanging onto your skirts. I'm trying to be Roger's friend. When I see a man . . . no, a boy . . .

LOUISE

Yes, he's only a boy.

EUGENE

Glad you admit it: trying to be Romeo doesn't do in this world, and you're no Juliet.

LOUISE

[*Smiling.*] No, I'm not romantic.

EUGENE

You see, Life is a funny game, all made up of laws——

LOUISE

You talk like you invented it.

EUGENE

We're all little babies in the game. You can't get away from those bitter dusty laws——

LOUISE

Are you sure love isn't a law?

EUGENE

You and he try to make a new world, but it's not real.

LOUISE

Didn't you ever hear it yourself, that clear love call?

EUGENE

I'm hearing it now.

LOUISE

What?

EUGENE

Take it for what it's worth . . . smiling! May I tell you?

LOUISE

Go on.

EUGENE

It's a dirty thing called Sex, made to laugh at.

LOUISE

You're no gentleman!

EUGENE

Can't you laugh? Just smile then. Come away to the seashore with me for a few weeks and forget it.

LOUISE

You ask me, just calmly like that?

EUGENE

Might be a real emotion.

LOUISE

You're nothing but a straw man!

EUGENE

I ask you in the most manly and cynical way . . . you hesitate, but think it over, I really believe you'll come. [*Enter* ROGER.] Hello, Roger.

ROGER

Hello.

EUGENE

One comes and one goes . . . funny! see you again. [*Exit* EUGENE.]

LOUISE

He just says a lot of words that people have told him, a straw man!

ROGER

What's he been saying to you?

LOUISE

I can't get away from it, Roger . . . this dirty thing, they call it Sex! Well, that's a pretty word, that is . . . what's in a girl that makes men's eyes pop? Am I dirty?

ROGER

My dear. [*He takes hold of her shoulder. She shakes him off.*]

LOUISE

Don't touch me. You too! oh, we kid ourselves, with this love fake! I guess it's all sort of dirt.

ROGER

What did that beast say to you?

LOUISE

Does it matter?

ROGER

Oh, I could see all right, making love to you—I'll show him! [ROGER *goes to door.*]

LOUISE

Where are you going?

ROGER

Settle with him once for all. [*Exit* ROGER.]

LOUISE

Roger, for my sake—— [*stopping bitterly*] What does he care about my sake? [*Enter* MISS BURNS.]

MISS BURNS

[*Scared, apologetic.*] There's a man here.

LOUISE

I can't see him.

MISS BURNS

It seems important. [*In a whisper:*] From the office, perhaps about a job. [*Loudly.*] Come in, Sir. [*Enter the* DETECTIVE, *a polite, noncommittal man, ingratiating but firm. He waits for* MISS BURNS *to leave. She exits.*]

DETECTIVE

Miss Chamberlain? Ah, yes, of course . . . my card . . . I am in the confidential employ of Elliott T. Rumsey. Get me? I make investigations.

LOUISE

What do you want of me?

DETECTIVE

Not a thing, not a thing in the world! There's been a theft, little matter of three thousand dollars, bonds. I don't know who did it, but of course I'll find out.

LOUISE

How can you?

DETECTIVE

Everything traceable down to some little cause—just interviewing you as a matter of form.

LOUISE

I can't talk to you tonight.

DETECTIVE

Why not?

LOUISE

Oh nerves . . .

DETECTIVE

If there's an emotional motive, we're inclined to be lenient: some love story . . . do you read the *Evening Journal?*

LOUISE

No.

DETECTIVE

City's full of that sort of thing, crimes of passion —but they don't unravel so easy! . . . h'm . . . that's where I come in.

LOUISE

I tell you I don't know anything, I'm just too tired to talk . . . tired!

DETECTIVE

Quite so, I'll be around again then . . . um . . . no hurry! Good night. [*He bows smiling.*]

Under a yellow lamp that hangs from ceiling, ROGER *and* EUGENE *face each other.*

ROGER

I love her, I tell you——

EUGENE

No, no, you get the thing dead wrong, listen! There are only two things in New York, Sex and Money—if you get one, you get the other.

ROGER

You're nothing but a straw man.

EUGENE

You're weak, led around by a woman.

ROGER

You and I are both weak, but I stand up to it, I know you, you're a fake, with your talk, talk——

EUGENE

Am I?

ROGER

I believe, under the skin, you're a dirty coward.

EUGENE

That's enough, you're nothing but a tramp in this town.

ROGER

A tramp can build his house, out of love and hate, higher than these sky-scrapers.

EUGENE

Talk about love, listen! [*He takes roll of bills from pocket, counting out.*] Hundred, two hundred, three hundred—— [*Putting rest of roll away prudently.*] I bet you that, I can get your girl in four days, for a joke, like everything else, to teach you.

ROGER

[*Livid with anger.*] I'll do the teaching then—take off your coat. [*Taking off his own.*] You're bigger than I am, but I bet I'm not so soft.

EUGENE

Say, you are in love——

ROGER

Coward, damn you, come on—— [*They approach each other savagely. Darkness.*]

LOUISE'S *flat.*

[LOUISE *sits lost in thoughts, unseeing. Enter* ROGER, *collar torn and sleeve ripped.*]

LOUISE

What have you done?

ROGER

We had a fight, we made too much noise, people came in and stopped us—but I would have won! So it ends like everything else, in a crazy joke.

LOUISE

You shouldn't have fought over me.

ROGER

Fought for you, like a knight, to conquer what stood between us! That's real anyway—when you draw blood!

LOUISE

What a child you are, Roger.

ROGER

So I come to you, kind of tired. [*Pause.*] I'm so lonely, Louise, I guess a man wants safeness in a woman: I come to you seeking refuge, I'm so sure of you now. [*She laughs.*] Why do you laugh?

LOUISE

Because there's no refuge in this life—it's a storm where your thoughts are blown like birds.

ROGER

Women have queer souls.

LOUISE

You don't know mine, you're too selfish ever to find out.

ROGER

I'll learn, slowly . . .

LOUISE

Then I'll tell you one thing I've been thinking: I'd cut my hair off, put on trousers and be a man, then you and I would go to sail the sea, Shanghai and the Bosphorous and nights at Port Said!

ROGER

[*Catching her moment's mood.*] There'd be many a fine sight sailing the sea under the stars!

LOUISE

You shall do that, Roger, but never I.

ROGER

Why not you?

LOUISE

Because it would be free that would, and brave—but for me there will never be any freedom.

ROGER

Wait . . . just wait!

LOUISE

Oh if I'd been bad, I might have had a swell time —but I came of a good family, my ancestors must have been terrible——

ROGER

Never mind our ancestors.

LOUISE

How can I help it? Don't I see them, with bony fingers pointing the way!

ROGER

You talk as if all your life were over behind you!

LOUISE

It is, all in the mud of defeat . . . and I sit here, just thinking about it.

ROGER

What about me?

LOUISE

[*Smiling.*] Selfish to the last, that's right. You don't need me, I'd be a fine stone around your neck! I really never had a will of my own, just negative . . . a bundle of denials: it's for you to be Yourself!

ROGER

You're killing me with this talk.

LOUISE

I must . . . good for you! Go it alone, I'm your childhood, bright and past. [*Looking at him with*

a new startling brightness.] You're a man from this minute.

ROGER

What do you mean?

LOUISE

All a joke anyway: I'm caught in a net, more subtle than Law, wider than Time, that's all there is to this pure love stuff! What are we anyway? Just two children, caught by this terrible Sex joke, that's all there is—— I've denied, I've been subtle, and all the time the clamor of the flesh was in my voice . . . [*Her voice is weakening as she speaks.*]

ROGER

What's happening to your voice?

LOUISE

Going away! My flesh is melting, so I can speak . . . [*She smiles.*] The dangerous spark between a man and a woman——

ROGER

Louise, what is all this?

LOUISE

Oh, I just imitated you, found Death when I wanted him, but I was clever, I did it very thor-

oughly—— An hour ago I took poison, it's working very nicely.

ROGER

[*Clutching her with his hands.*] Get up, Louise, stand up——

LOUISE

You can't fight Death with your fists!

ROGER

You can't go like this, mustn't, I need you.

LOUISE

Oh there was a moment, our moment, when I loved you, Roger . . . I love the world now—so the feeling grows till it bursts!

ROGER

You can't go like that——

LOUISE

I told you no man would get me: you see what an awful coward I am . . . [*She rises.*] My mother and father and all the grandmothers . . . how glad they are now, saying we got her all right! I'm coming, old people, I'm coming pure . . . [*Clutching her breast.*] It hurts! [*Smiling.*] Passion exists, when everything turns black and reality dies. [*She*

sits. ROGER *galvanized into action rushes off. We hear his voice off-stage.*]

ROGER

Get a doctor, telephone, quickly, quickly . . . She's poisoned—can't you understand, poisoned: antidotes, water, anything, mix it—— [*He returns still talking, carrying a glass.*] People can't go in less than a few hours, there's lots of time, perfectly safe, lots of time, perfectly safe, lots of time . . . [*Softly, urgently, as he stands over her with the glass.*] Louise, you must take it you must—— [*He looks at her unresponsive face. Quietly, simply, he knows that she has died. He puts down the glass, shrinks away from her, stands at a safe distance, petrified with fear. He sinks to his knees mumbling prayers.*]

The offices of ELLIOTT T. RUMSEY *in full swing. Men at desks in five little compartments, moving papers in unison stiffly. Rumsey at his desk. The* DETECTIVE *stands beside it, reporting to* RUMSEY, *who sits grimly.*

DETECTIVE

It don't unravel so easy: lots of feelings, running crisscross.

RUMSEY

Never mind the feelings.

DETECTIVE

The police are questioning this boy——

RUMSEY

What was the name?

DETECTIVE

Roger Bloomer. But my theory is suicide. I seen it in her eye.

RUMSEY

And the funeral?

DETECTIVE

Wednesday at two, from the house. Woodlawn Cemetery. Seems her mother and grandmother lie there.

RUMSEY

Any other details?

DETECTIVE

No, Sir.

RUMSEY

Send an appropriate wreath in my name. She seemed like a good girl, got herself into trouble.

What can you expect? [*Abruptly.*] It's a bitter thing. Nothing left these days for the pure women but Death.

The JUDGE *sits on his high seat in judicial robes, holding a gavel.*

[*It reminds one of the* COLLEGE EXAMINER *in* ACT I, *but this* JUDGE *is a round little man with red face, sitting high up wagging his head. Below him stands* ROGER.]

THE JUDGE

You were present when she took this poisonous concoction?

ROGER

No, Judge.

THE JUDGE

Address me as your Honor.

ROGER

No, your Honor.

THE JUDGE

The girl was already poisoned then, when you came in, talked, chatted as if nothing had happened? [ROGER *nods.*] What did you talk about?

ROGER

About our future.

THE JUDGE

She didn't have much future. [*He chuckles loudly.*] Now tell me in detail what you said.

ROGER

[*With difficulty.*] We talked about how to be free.

THE JUDGE

Ah, intellectual people!

ROGER

No, human beings.

THE JUDGE

Tut . . . tut . . . tut . . . [*He shakes his head and makes a noise expressing grave disapproval. Then, startlingly, he points his gavel at* ROGER.] You still deny having deliberately planned the death of this young woman?

ROGER

I loved her, I tell you.

THE JUDGE

[*Wagging his head.*] Well, you might love her to death, eh. . . . What is love and how does it connect with crime? [*Very pleased with himself.*] Tut!

make a note of that. . . I suppose you got in too deep for your age.

ROGER

[*Desperately.*] Love's free, isn't it?

THE JUDGE

No, indeed, not in a civilized community; we have laws here.

ROGER

I only mean——

THE JUDGE

[*Interrupting sternly.*] Are you a Socialist?

ROGER

I don't think so, sir, your Honor.

THE JUDGE

Lucky for you . . . a man of your age in a case like this! It's anarchical: where is our young manhood going? People have lost the old standards: where will these passions end? Have you any idea of right and wrong?

ROGER

No, sir; but, by God, I intend to find out.

THE JUDGE

[*Hammering hard with his gavel as if a host of people were attacking him.*] Not here; Order in the Court! Every crime or misfortune is due to disorganization of ideas: Organize your ideas, young man! What use are you to Society? Hah! I've got you there! [*He hammers with gavel.*] You are held as a material witness until further evidence. Let him cool his thoughts in a cell!

ROGER *sits in a gray cell, dimly lighted.*

ROGER

[*Alone.*] What use am I to Society? They put you in a gray place and tell you to think! Fat people sit on thrones, reading dusty laws. . . . To hell with Society, to hell with everything that stands between me and my own soul! [*He laughs.*] Damn fool I am. Death is the only way to know your soul fully: then I could do it right now, mash my head against a wall, that would clear my brain, and not much loss—what am I? a straw man torn by windy feelings! There must be some secret word that I've never known . . . magic secret that turns a boy into a man! It's easy to face Death, but at Life I dare not look. [*A great rattling of keys and a door opens, letting in a bright ray of light.*]

PRISON ATTENDANT

[*Gruffly.*] Some one to see you. [*Enter* BLOOMER, *wearing a fancy vest, puffing and frightened. The* ATTENDANT *goes.* BLOOMER *looks around uncomfortably.*]

BLOOMER

Roger, I find you at last . . . not much of a place to be!

ROGER

Father, I didn't pick it of my own accord.

BLOOMER

I'm not here to blame: thank God I've come, thank God.

ROGER

Be all right, dad.

BLOOMER

I think I can get you out, I've talked to my lawyers, a matter of seeing the right people.

ROGER

Dad . . . [*His voice choked, uncertain.*] How's everyone? Business good?

BLOOMER

So, so, . . . it's a dull year.

ROGER

What about mother?

BLOOMER

She sent me, so I came on from Iowa, to find death in the path. Your mother wants you back, Roger, back where it's safe.

ROGER

I guess Death's everywhere, Death stalks the Middle West.

BLOOMER

I've seen her my boy.

ROGER

Who?

BLOOMER

The defunct . . . it's a beautiful corpse, the old lady's half crazy.

ROGER

[*Laughs.*] I bet she enjoys it.

BLOOMER

[*Slowly.*] Nothing to laugh at, I assure you, I'm moved.

ROGER

Is Death so sacred? just another joke, like the other mysteries that people cry about.

BLOOMER

You've got yourself to consider.

ROGER

I know it.

BLOOMER

[*In a hushed voice.*] Tell me, was she a bad woman?

ROGER

Is that all you care about?

BLOOMER

Did she tempt you, lure, lead you on?

ROGER

[*Smiling.*] Oh, she was pure and quiet.

BLOOMER

Then why did she do it?

ROGER

Love's a queer thing.

BLOOMER

[*Shaking head gloomily.*] Right.

ROGER

I tell you, it was the real thing, this was.

BLOOMER

Um . . . nothing in it, nothing in that kind of love!

ROGER

That's what she said.

BLOOMER

[*Startled.*] Oh, I see.

ROGER

Pure, and crushed she was, the quiet one seeking quietness . . . so she left me to go it alone, she made even that sacrifice. . . . Old people have made dusty laws, they won't let love live!

BLOOMER

[*Puzzled, unhappy.*] I'm not so young as I was, boy.

ROGER

I guess we understand each other now, dad.

BLOOMER

You see, Roger, I wanted to save you from every unhappy thing.

ROGER

The young must learn!

BLOOMER

Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, you are, Roger. I know what you've been through, felt it myself, step by step.

ROGER

I see now, dad, that's a secret I didn't know.

BLOOMER

It's this way: your mother's crying and I came for you.

ROGER

Guess you've been making money out in Iowa.

BLOOMER

[*Muttering.*] Yes, I've made money, but what good is it?

ROGER

I could tell by your vest.

BLOOMER

For God's sake, Roger, for your mother, come back.

ROGER

Never . . . never . . . why ask me the one thing I can't do? Don't make it harder for me. I must go on——

BLOOMER

Still the same boy, seeing things, dreams.

ROGER

Oh, I'm frightened and alone; been sitting here thinking in this cell, but there's a great voice in me saying, Roger Bloomer, go it alone. [*A pause.* BLOOMER *mutters unhappily.*]

BLOOMER

All right. You'll be needing money for that. [BLOOMER *puts a hand timidly on his son's shoulder.*] Never . . . never say an old man didn't understand. [*The* ATTENDANT *returns.*]

THE ATTENDANT

Time's up.

BLOOMER

[*Muttering.*] See it through, boy; I'll speak to those lawyers, try to fix it somehow. . . . [*Exit*

BLOOMER *and* ATTENDANT. *Keys jangle in the lock.*]

ROGER

[*Alone.*] A man must fight alone . . . in torture alone, with his own dreams! Is Death coming for me, too? Better than a prison . . . Love and Death are one laughter ringing in my ears. [*He lies down. The prison walls open, revealing a shrouded body lying in a wide green place.* ROGER *rises.*] In the open at last . . . here's a space for dreams . . . space. . . . [*He knows that a nightmare has taken him and that he belongs to it.*]

NOTE

ROGER'S *dream is a nightmare of pursuit.*

This follows technique of a very rapid ballet, with accompaniment of words half chanted. Playing time is extremely short, for it is done at great speed, like a piece of very exciting music.

There are three movements or strophes:

First Strophe: *All the figures of the play, representing the conventions and proprieties, surround* ROGER *threateningly in grotesque black.*

Second Strophe: *In* ROGER'S *fevered imagination, the grotesque figures become a mocking orgy of Sex and Obscenity. Behind all the respectabilities, there is obscenity and fear of Death.* ROGER *defies the taunting ghosts, they rush upon him to kill him.*

Third Strophe: LOUISE, *"the dream that will not die," life force, rises radiant to protect him, dispersing the bloody ghosts that surround him, leaving him alone, ready for manhood.*

Pale green light spreads over the floor, luminous, mystic. The bier makes an oblong shadow.

ROGER

What body is this? Who lies here dreaming Death's dream? Here in the desert of my soul, beside the body of love, dead love made beautiful, I pray . . . [*From either side of the bier pop out the* COLLEGE EXAMINER *and the* JUDGE, *one long and sinister and the other fat and round, both in black robes, one with a stick and the other with a gavel.*]

COLLEGE EXAMINER

About time you prayed, young man.

THE JUDGE

Hah! About time you organized your thoughts.

COLLEGE EXAMINER

Don't you know us, Roger?

THE JUDGE

Lawmakers!

COLLEGE EXAMINER

Aged and wise.

ROGER

So you've come down off your thrones, at last—here then, tell me the truth!

THE JUDGE

[*Jumping about gayly.*] What is love? How does it connect with crime?

COLLEGE EXAMINER

[*Severely.*] Brothels, gambling dens, tenements, crimes of passion——

THE JUDGE

Must be stopped, must be stopped!

COLLEGE EXAMINER

Obedience and competitive ambition.

THE JUDGE

[*Gayly.*] Early to bed, early to rise——

ROGER

[*Disgusted.*] What about my heart?

COLLEGE EXAMINER

Your heart is dust!

THE JUDGE

Your heart will be silent soon!—

ROGER

You lawmakers are a couple of old women.

COLLEGE EXAMINER

Ah, but we've got you in our claws.

THE JUDGE

[*Getting gayer and gayer.*] Torture you at will. . . .

ROGER

My father's got money, he'll get me out.

COLLEGE EXAMINER

You'll come to us in the end, like she did! [*Pointing to the corpse.*] Death is our servant! [*There has entered behind, a procession of ghostly creatures, bird-like with enormous flapping wings; these grotesques have awful claws, shapeless bodies, resembling demons in some of Goya's etchings.*]

ROGER

[*Backs away frightened.*] What are these, what birds of Death?

COLLEGE EXAMINER

[*Rubbing hands.*] Precisely!

THE JUDGE

Birds of Death——

COLLEGE EXAMINER

These are our servants. [*He and the* JUDGE *laugh as grotesques surround them with locked wings, making big shadows, menacing, concealing the three from audience.* ROGER, *afraid and defiant, breaks through the grotesques, backing to front of stage. A cackle of dim laughter near him. Two old women are beside him. Immensely old, hobbling, one is very tall, one tiny, deformed. The former carries a stick and the latter a gavel. The resemblance to* COLLEGE EXAMINER *and* JUDGE *is suggested in spite of their scrawny, strange figures. They stand on either side of* ROGER, *twisting their bony hands, very real and very servile.*]

TALL OLD WOMAN

This is Death's day, this is Death's feast!

SMALL OLD WOMAN

We are the old women of the Law!

TALL OLD WOMAN

We are older than time.

ROGER

Oh, shadows, is Death coming to me too, with black wings shutting out the light . . . give me a moment, Death, a moment to know life!

TALL OLD WOMAN

We clean up at funerals.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

We brush, we sweep, we clean!

TALL OLD WOMAN

Servants of Death and time!

THE OLD WOMEN

[*Beckoning to* ROGER, *make a ridiculous whistling sound.*] Whst! . . . Pst! [*They go to either end of the bier.*]

TALL OLD WOMAN

She died for us.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

The Law took her.

TALL OLD WOMAN

[*Whispering significantly.*] A beautiful corpse.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Look at the breast that never knew a child.

TALL OLD WOMAN

Look at the swift legs that lie so still.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Only look! [*The grotesques approach close to the corpse threateningly, their wings interlocked in a great black shadow.* ROGER *stands in front. The two old women lift sheet off the body, holding white sheet high in order to conceal body from audience. They beckon to* ROGER. ROGER *moves to it and looks behind. He gives terrific scream and backs away.*]

ROGER

[*His voice broken and excited.*] Blood! Blood! They're tearing the white flesh to shreds, destroying, destroying . . . [*Raising both arms high in air,* ROGER *throws himself madly defensively against the bier, falling over dead body, head first, arms out, he lies there a moment. All the wings and masks have fallen from the bird-like figures. They are people in black; solemn and real, men and women with hands folded on their fronts. All of them throughout have air of taking part in a ferocious, formal and noisy*

ceremony, as might be a Black Mass in a Christian Science Church. The words are jumbled together in a mad crescendo. The two old women remain unchanged. The orderly row of black figures starts to sing a hymn, very low]:

"When my last hour cometh,
Fraught with strife and pain,
When my dust returneth
To the dust again"——

[*Meanwhile the two old women lean across the bier, raising* Roger, *one by each arm.*]

Tall Old Woman

And isn't it written that the flesh shall be destroyed?

Small Old Woman

We destroy!

Tall Old Woman

You've given us voices, now you shall hear!

Small Old Woman

You've broken into Death's feast, you've fronted Death's wings——

Tall Old Woman

Now you shall see!

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Like vultures we come, like flame to devour, to feed on the white flesh made beautiful and clean, when the dangerous spark has left it and the rich muscles are flat . . . we come! we come!

PEOPLE BEHIND

[*Groaningly.*] We come.

POPPIN

[*In a silk hat and frock coat.*] You've made us real.

RUMSEY

[*Similarly dressed.*] You've given us a name——

TALL OLD WOMAN

[*In a sing-song litany.*] Black-winged we came.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

With eyes like glass and tongues like flame . . .

TALL OLD WOMAN

To trouble all your dreaming with white rage and red shame!

MISS BURNS

[*Bustling around corpse.*] We make it neat and cheerful! [POPPIN *and* RUMSEY *raise their silk hats and bow to* ROGER *in unison like marionettes.*]

POPPIN

I wear a frock coat to keep sin out of my heart.

RUMSEY

I wear a high hat because it's a charm against passion.

ROGER

There's blood on your hands! [POPPIN *and* RUMSEY *produce enormous white handkerchiefs and separate one to each side, wiping their hands carefully.* EUGENE *with a tremendous bunch of lilies, which he starts strewing poetically on the shrouded figure. The Fat Landlady peaks covetously at the corpse.*]

LANDLADY

Virgins is so beautiful, think of what they missed!

BOTH OLD WOMEN

Pst! Whst! Sin is what she missed.

LANDLADY

[*To Roger.*] Don't forget the old girl with the mother's heart.

ROGER

The unquenched heart! Are you still looking for love? [*Indicating* EUGENE.] Take him, the straw man, he's hidden love in his cigarette case, he brings it out with a snap, and says "Have one, have one!"

LANDLADY

[*Lasciviously to* EUGENE.] A little love, dearie, a little clean kiss—— [EUGENE *is frightened.* LANDLADY *pursues him vigorously.*]

SMALL OLD WOMAN

[*On one side of* ROGER.] You hear . .

TALL OLD WOMAN

You see . . .

ROGER

I've looked at Death face to face and I'm not afraid.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

But Life you have not seen! [LANDLADY *catches* EUGENE *after chasing him madly all over stage. She shakes him like a straw man and pulls him into shadow.*]

ROGER

Where does Life dwell? [*The* OLD WOMEN *laugh.*]

BOTH OLD WOMEN

In Samarcand, in Arabia or in Peru?

SMALL OLD WOMAN

There is sand, sand on the green places, sand on the tombs of the old dead, sand in the mouths of the dreamers. . . .

BOTH OLD WOMEN

Whst! . . . Pst! . . . Sand! [LANDLADY *re-appears red-faced, with two large bunches of straw in her hands.*]

LANDLADY

He won't do, nothing in him but straw! [RAGGED MAN *and* MISS BURNS *bring forward a flapping straw figure resembling* EUGENE. *They fall on it, tearing it apart.*]

MISS BURNS

Pray for him, pray for the man of sawdust and straw!

RUMSEY

They told him this——

POPPIN

They told him that——

SMALL OLD WOMAN

[*To* ROGER.] But wait till we take you to pieces, you're straw too!

TALL OLD WOMAN

Just a straw man!

CONFUSED VOICES

Sawdust and ashes . . . sawdust and ashes . . . [*They toss the limp remains of the figure in the air, covering the stage with sawdust, straw and sand.*]

MISS BURNS

[*To* ROGER.] Death is so sweet and soft, like a mother. . . .

TALL OLD WOMAN

Come to our breasts, our old bony mother's breasts!

SMALL OLD WOMAN

I am Death, the mother. . . .

ROGER

[*Shouting.*] I laugh at Death's day, there shall be no more death . . . I'm through with you ghosts,

whimpering ghosts. . . [*All the dark figures menacing around him.*] Here by the body of love you've killed, I ask for life!

[Second Strophe: *Change in manner of nightmare and technique of playing.*]

[*The* Street Walker *staggers forward, pushing people to right and left; she is staggering drunk, carrying a very large bottle.*]

Street Walker

[*Staggering in circle around* Roger.]

See life, lonely boy, the whole hog in a silk chemise, sweet mama five dollars in silk, ten dollars in skin. . . .

[*Drinking long from bottle, she holds it out with raucous laugh.*]

Here's love in a bottle.

[*All the black figures begin to sway drunkenly.*]

Small Old Woman

[*On one side of* Roger.] Love and Death are so near, so near . . .

Tall Old Woman

Out of obscenity and fear . . .

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Virgin and whore, the flesh grown stale!

TALL OLD WOMAN

Heart of dust and lips so pale—— [*Wild laughter, figures sway more drunkenly. A ray of sickly yellow light falls from above on* ROGER *and* STREET WALKER *center.*]

STREET WALKER

[*Insinuatingly.*] Silk, satin, perfume, an' a sweet drink. . . [*Leaning against the bier, she raises the bottle to* ROGER. *But the bottle has suddenly grown enormous, three feet tall, and on it in big black letters "Rat Poison—Best for Pests."*]

ROGER

[*Takes it and holds it high.*] Death comes in many forms! [*He smashes bottle to floor. A crash. Total darkness. Then a bright ray of white light falls from directly above on* ROGER. *He stands with long sword, swinging it in both hands, the light flashing on it, shouting*]: Come on then, birds of Death . . . I'm strong and alone; come on, who's first, I take life in my hand! [*Dim laughter in blackness.*]

MOCKING VOICES

[*Out of darkness around him.*] Hero! Superman! Prophet! Hero!

SMALL OLD WOMAN

[*Bent with mocking laughter, comes behind* ROGER *in circle of light.*] You think love is a sword? Will you defy us, young hero? We are the generations of men, we are the mothers of time!

ROGER

I alone against these bloody generations——

SMALL OLD WOMAN

It's the sword of death in your hand! [*She laughs.* ROGER *turns and lunges at her with the sword. It goes through her. She jumps gayly and thumbs her nose at him.*] It's all Sex! The oracle has spoken! But Sex is the sword of Death! We kill, we kill! [ROGER *holds the long sword.*]

STREET WALKER

[*Coming to him.*] My hero, ain't you strong! Hero-papa . . . sweet daddy! [*She tries to embrace him.*]

ROGER

[*Pushing her off.*] Ghost of love, ghost of death, don't touch me!

STREET WALKER

[*Sings in quavering voice, wriggling a little.*] "Smother me with kisses, dearie, kill me with love!" [ROGER *plunges his sword into* STREET WALKER. *It sticks through her belly and with a ghostly smile she starts to wriggle on it. She is doing an Oriental dance, crooning lasciviously. A beating of Oriental music*: RUMSEY, *the* RAGGED MAN *and* POPPIN *are clashing brassy instruments. The* TWO OLD WOMEN *come on either side of* ROGER.]

SMALL OLD WOMAN

My hero!

TALL OLD WOMAN

Where's your sword now? [ROGER *wrenches back the sword, but in his hand is a big green snake writhing. With exclamation of disgust, he throws it from him.*]

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Obscene thoughts in your head.

TALL OLD WOMAN

Obscene wishes in your belly.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Here is love to tempt you. [*She brings the fat* LANDLADY *to* ROGER.]

LANDLADY

[*In a saccharine voice.*] I am the Sacred Cow, an' I got a mother's heart.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Veil her in seven veils. [TWO OLD WOMEN *begin to wrap veils round* LANDLADY *ridiculously. Clashing of instruments continues. The* LANDLADY *and* STREET WALKER *dance around* ROGER.]

RAGGED MAN

[*To* ROGER.] Aw it's nuthin' to me, wimmin an' death an' garbage.

TALL OLD WOMAN

[*Shouting and pointing to* LANDLADY.] She is the Sacred Queen, holy and obscene . . .

VOICES

[*Chanting.*] Holy . . . holy . . . holy . . .

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Put a shadow round me and I'll make an obscene sign.

RUMSEY

[*Addressing* ROGER *importantly.*] The triangle of the Y. M. C. A.

TALL OLD WOMAN

That's a harlot's sign.

POPPIN

Your mother's wedding ring.

TALL OLD WOMAN

That's a harlot's sign.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Holy and obscene . . .

TALL OLD WOMAN

We brush, we sweep, we clean!

VOICES

[*Chanting.*] Holy . . . holy . . . holy . . .

POPPIN

Cross-eyed harlots are blinking in the sinister arc-lights.

RUMSEY

Perverse people are doing perversions on park benches.

POPPIN

A hundred thousand harlots, seeking love with creaky shoes, up the street, down the street, up the street, down the street. . . .

RAGGED MAN

[*Rubbing his hands, dancing about.*] Wimmin an' death an' garbage . . . [LANDLADY *has thrown her veils over the bier, one by one. Under them she appears in Oriental dancer's costume, her fat flesh in rolls, with a great many bells on her jangling. After shaking bells in front of* ROGER, *she disappears into shadow, bells still tinkling.*]

STREET WALKER

[*Beckoning to* ROGER *pitifully.*] Got mazuma for love-bird? I show you silk shimmy, silk . . . [*Suddenly her clothes drop off, a brilliant light falls on her in fancy silk chemise with sheer stockings, just like a figure in a Broadway shop window. She starts to*

sing in a monotonous voice, "Just a love nest!" *On either side of stage appears a love-nest exaggeratedly garish with pink lights around it. At left,* LANDLADY *on pink seat with* RAGGED MAN *kneeling before her like colored post card. Opposite side* MISS BURNS *in a hammock in startling frilled clothes with* RUMSEY, *silk hat in one hand, stealing a kiss. The* STREET WALKER *in spotlight abruptly stops dancing. Dead silence, figures in position as if made of wax.*]

SMALL OLD WOMAN

[*Cringing beside* ROGER.] Here is Life! Is this what you want?

ROGER

A fake, a fake! I want something real; where's the real thing? [*Dim laughter and love-nests disappear.*]

TALL OLD WOMAN

Where is peace for a tired soul?

SMALL OLD WOMAN

[*Still beside* ROGER *in lighted space.*] Death is real! Have you smelled Death, the lecherous smell of decaying flesh!

TALL OLD WOMAN

Kill him and show him Death! [*Confusion among black figures moving in shadow round lighted space where* ROGER *stands.*]

ROGER

[*Quietly.*] I know you want to kill me, you stand bloody about me. I have felt my muscles swell strong in me, I have had joy in the sweat of my body, I have taken life in my hand——

BOTH OLD WOMEN

Whst! . . . Pst! . . .

TALL OLD WOMAN

Fill his mouth with straw——

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Stuff his mouth with sand! [*They seize* ROGER *and stuff his mouth with straw and sand, with which stage is strewn.*]

TALL OLD WOMAN

[*Raises both hands high, screaming mystically.*] Sex, the sword of Death! [*All the people have now covered themselves with veils which were around*

LANDLADY. *Men veiled with great straight swords surround* ROGER. *Two old women also veil themselves. Women come forward veiled, pushing the men back wildly, their breasts against the swords.*]

A VEILED WOMAN

[*Softly beside* ROGER.] I am love . . . take me, I am a mother's love! [*Dead silence.*]

ANOTHER WOMAN

[*Speaks to* ROGER *in sweet, soft voice.*] And I . . .

ANOTHER WOMAN

[*Ever so softly.*] I am a mother's love . . .

ANOTHER WOMAN

And I am . . . [*The straw in* ROGER'S *mouth has disappeared. He is suddenly able to speak. He seizes the woman roughly, tearing off veil.*]

ROGER

I touched you and I knew, my own, my flesh-mother . . . [*It is* MRS. BLOOMER. *She speaks in an agonized voice.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

Take me, I am a mother's love! [*There is silence around them.*]

ROGER

Mother, stand by me now, here's Death, help me now! I'm your son!

MRS. BLOOMER

Roger, what's the world coming to?

ROGER

I love you, mother, I can't tell you, I love you so. [*Tears choke him.*]

MRS. BLOOMER

I bore you in torture, Roger . . . flesh of my flesh, your pain is my pain, your tears are my tears . . . [ROGER *looks at her fixedly, around them an awful silence, then takes both her hands.*]

ROGER

Mother, there's blood on your hands, too.

MRS. BLOOMER

[*Softly.*] I am a mother's love, and I bring you the peace of death, relax, Roger, be a child, mesmerize yourself, softly, softly.

ROGER

[*Violently, breaking away from his mother.*] No, no, you're a fake, singing Death's old lullaby . . .

If I die, then I die like a man . . . laughing . . . [*Bursting into great laughter.*] I am ready to stand and shake the roof of the world with laughing . . . [*They all fall upon* ROGER *madly, the women with whips snapping them, men with swords.* SMALL OLD WOMAN *jumps on the bier, crowing like a cock,* "Kyry-eerie-oo . . . kyry-eerie-oo!". ROGER *stands against the bier defending himself.* POPPIN *and* RUMSEY *throw him away from it violently. He goes down on his knees. And the confusion continues, swords and whips raised against him. Then total darkness. Then a mellow light grows slowly on* ROGER, *still on his knees.* LOUISE *stands beside him, radiant as an angel. He doesn't dare look up. All the menacing figures have gone. The* TWO OLD WOMEN *stand stiff, one on either side of the pair.*]

LOUISE

[*With a little choked laugh.*] You whispered my name, how could I fail you? Does love bargain? Does love ask a sacrifice?

TALL OLD WOMAN

Pst! There's a woman beside him.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Pst! . . . Whst! He made a dream of a woman.

LOUISE

Shall the terrors of the night touch you, shall the old ghosts that walk in mist make you afraid!

ROGER

But they're here the bloody-handed, here to take me——

LOUISE

Truth like a flame and life like a garment upon you shall be between you and them!

ROGER

I called love in the desert and the wind blew sand into my mouth, and the sand covered me——

BOTH OLD WOMEN

Pst! . . . Whst! . . .

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Make an obscene sign!

TALL OLD WOMAN

No use! She's stronger than we, she's older than we and younger, she's the dream that will not die!

LOUISE

Away! Away, ghosts of yesterday, for the young are coming marching, marching; can't you hear the echo of their feet, can't you hear them singing a new song?

SMALL OLD WOMAN

There's a woman at the bottom of the world——

TALL OLD WOMAN

She's pure, but men go mad looking at her smile——

SMALL OLD WOMAN

Her heart's bitter-sweet——

TALL OLD WOMAN

No man shall know her heart!

SMALL OLD WOMAN

She's older and younger then we, she of the strangling hair, and you know her by the harlot's sign!

TALL OLD WOMAN

The Virgin Harlot!

LOUISE

Don't mind what they say, Roger; it's only yourself that matters.

SMALL OLD WOMAN

She has strangling hair——

TALL OLD WOMAN

They that kiss her lips go mad. [*They disappear with dim laughter.*]

LOUISE

[*Softly, in a matter-of-fact way.*] They've gone, so I too must go: you see, it's true . . . I can't help you much! [*She laughs, infinitely gentle.*]

ROGER

Give me a sign so that I may know the truth.

LOUISE

I can't. . . . I sit at the bottom of the world thinking what no one knows.

ROGER

It's all a bitter joke then, to the last.

LOUISE

Laughter is not enough, denial is not enough.

ROGER

And love?

LOUISE

Not enough! In yourself you must find the secret.

ROGER

But I can't bear to be alone.

LOUISE

Oh, the passions of childhood were easy, but a man's thought is another thing.

ROGER

I can't bear it, don't go——

LOUISE

Would you make a dream real to trouble all your dreaming? The Virgin Harlot is very tender and her dangerous touch brings life to the tired. . . . Am I not, too, alone, where the great laughter of Death sounds like the sea! It's worth it, Roger. Life and Death are one music . . .

ROGER

I hear like a beating of wings . . .

LOUISE

[*With a little laugh.*] Of course . . . Go it alone, Roger; are you ready now? [*He nods grimly, understanding at last.*] I've given you yourself, take

it. . . . Face the music; what music, falling about you like rain; what splendor of broken chords, brass trumpets braying in the morning and whisper of harps in the dusk . . . and far off, listen, the tread of marching people singing a new song . . . Good-by. . . . [*She raises her hand to him, with a laugh.*] A man's luck, Roger. [*They smile at each other across a distance. Total darkness. Then the jangling of a key in a lock, and a bright ray of light from an open door. The* PRISON ATTENDANT *appears.*]

ATTENDANT

[*Gruffly, with big bunch of keys jangling.*] Come on, you're free, there's the world out there. [ROGER *rises and goes toward the lighted doorway, yawning, rubbing his eyes, still full of dreams.*]

CURTAIN